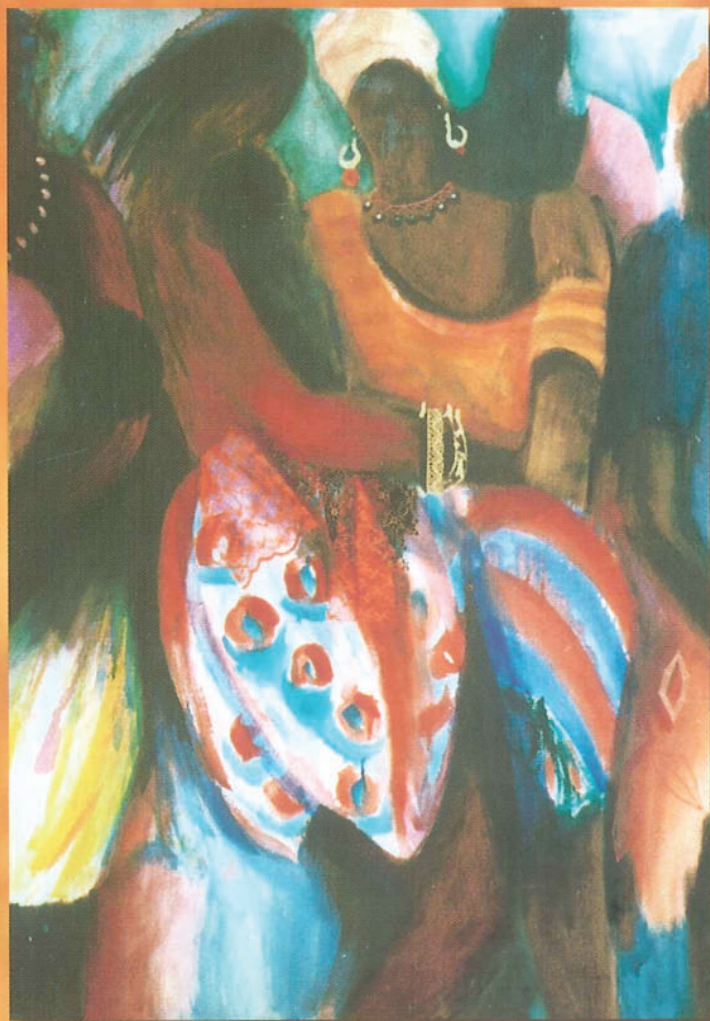


Short Writings from Bulawayo



Edited by Jane Morris

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
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from
Bulawayo

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Jane Morris

'amaBooks



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Preface

Short Writings from Bulawayo is a book of stories, poems and non-fiction pieces. The collection tells of many things: of family and friendship, of fear and death, of witches and spirits, of hunger and drought, of dreams and aspirations, of leaving home and leaving Zimbabwe, of queues and loneliness, of football and bicycles, of growing old and of love. A unifying theme of many of the stories and poems is loss – of innocence, of purpose, of love, of culture, of belonging, of life. A reflection of our times.

Most of the writings are set in the homes, streets and bars of present day Bulawayo, or in the surrounding rural areas. We also get a glimpse through the eyes of the writers into the lives of different people at different times – from Makokoba in the 1920s, through Thorngrove of the 1950s to rural Matabeleland in the 1960s and 1980s.

The collection takes us from the elegiac quality of John Eppel's *Rain in Winter* to the rumbustious energy of Spencer Crewe's *The Little House*; from the scholarly writing of Terence Ranger to the fertile imaginations of Christopher Mlalazi and Farai Mpofu. Some of the stories and poems will make you sad and some will make you smile.

The pieces were chosen for their good writing, but also to reflect and celebrate the diversity of life in and around the City of Bulawayo. The inspiration for the book was to give voice to new writers who might otherwise be unheard and, through their writing, to bring together the different communities that make up Bulawayo – to show that there is more to unite us than to divide us.

Contents

<i>Shadows</i>	Godfrey M. Sibanda	1
<i>White Man Walking</i>	John Eppel	4
<i>The Little House</i>	Spencer Crewe	7
<i>Evil That Fathers Do</i>	Mathew Chokuwenga	11
<i>Longings</i>	Judy Maphosa	12
<i>Ever Smart</i>	Pete Hutton	16
<i>The Hand of Darkness</i>	Christopher Mlalazi	22
<i>Bush Cucumber</i>	Anne Simone Hutton	35
<i>The Bar</i>	Tawanda Chipato	36
<i>The Queue</i>	Bryony Rheam	40
<i>Rain in Winter</i>	John Eppel	55
<i>The Witch</i>	Farai Mpofu	56
<i>The Erl-king</i>	Deon Marcus	60
<i>True Love</i>	Mzana Mthimkhulu	61
<i>Man in Stocking</i>	Anne Simone Hutton	67
<i>A Seed of Hope</i>	Masimba Manyonga	68

<i>Reverie on a Dark Beauty</i>	John S. Read	75
<i>Bicycles and the Social History of Bulawayo</i>	Terence Ranger	76
<i>The Boxing Day Clashes of 1929</i>	Pathisa Nyathi	82
<i>One Man's View of the World</i>	A.D.C. Hyland	88
<i>Developing Rhodes' Grave</i>	Jackson Ndlovu	90
<i>On a Day Like This</i>	Bhekilizwe Dube	95
<i>Grandfather's Birthday</i>	Shirley Tarr	101
<i>Bhalagwe</i>	Shari Eppel	108
<i>Mtagati Mkulu</i>	Derek Huggins	111
<i>Prima Donna</i>	Deon Marcus	122
<i>The Apple Tree</i>	Deon Marcus	123
<i>Tuli</i>	Pete Hutton	124
Contributors		129

Shadows

Godfrey M. Sibanda

A cock crowed in the old woman's dreams. It was a long, dry sound that petered out to three sharp knocks on the door of her hut. Instinctively, her eyes opened and she rasped out a question.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Luba."

For a moment she remained motionless, her brain tugging at the winding, fragile threads of her memory. Luba. Her granddaughter, Lubalenkosi. Then it came to her in full force: *Luba was leaving home*. The old woman got up from her bed and lit a paraffin lamp before going to the door to admit Luba. The girl came in and unslung a black canvas bag from her shoulder. She went and sat on a reed mat near the bed. Her face, arms and legs were covered with a shining veneer of Vaseline. After closing the door, the old woman came and sat on the bed.

"Are you ready to go, Luba?"

"Yebo, gogo."

"You have the fare for the bus?"

"I have everything, gogo."

"And the bible I gave you yesterday, you have it as well?"

"It is in my bag, gogo."

"Read it everyday, do you hear? Every time before you go to sleep."

"I will try to, gogo."

"And tell your uncle to send us some mealie meal."

"I will tell him, gogo."

"A fifty kilo bag, do you hear? What can ten kilos do for eleven stomachs?"

"It's now ten stomachs, gogo."

"Oh, how I forget my arithmetic. Eleven minus one Luba equals ten, heh-heh-heh!"

Lubalenkosi joined in the laughter. Afterwards the old woman continued with the instructions.

“If your uncle cannot send you to school, get a job and go to night school. Education is life, child of my child. Do not rush to get married, do you hear? Men are no good to anyone. They were no good to me, they were useless to your mother, they are not even good to themselves. Education, child of my child, and your Bible – that is all you need.”

She saw Luba smile and thought, the girl is not even listening; she will soon learn what I mean.

Outside in the darkness, the old woman heard some cocks crowing. The chickens were all that was left after three years of drought. The chickens, the hunger, and the dust. The dust raised by the young ones rushing to the cities to escape the poverty and the hopelessness. Already, six of her grandsons had joined others on the trek to Jo’burg, to Perdition. Some would never come back. Others would return in coffins, or as ailing, desiccated victims of this new disease. Now it was the girls’ turn to go. But Luba was only going as far as the city of Bulawayo, four hundred kilometres away.

The old woman stared through misty eyes at the flickering shadows on the wall behind the girl. She tried to reach out into their world and ask them: *Are you good shadows or bad shadows? Will you take care of my Luba and accompany her back home, or will you desert her once you see the electric lights of the city? She is an intelligent child; please push her in the right direction.* But the shadows remained locked up in their world, dancing to their mysterious tune and keeping all the answers to themselves. The old woman felt the shards of pain scratching at her eyes. It gave bad luck to cry when someone went to war: she struggled to contain her tears.

“Go well then, child of my child.”

“Stay well, gogo.”

“Is anyone accompanying you to the bus stop?”

“Yes, gogo. Thandi and George will take me as far as the bus stop.”

“Don’t forget to write.”

“I will write, gogo.”

Lubalenkosi rose to her feet and hugged her grandmother goodbye. Without another word, the girl walked out into the darkness,

taking all her shadows with her.

Afterwards, when the old woman had sniffed all her pain into an old hankie, she blew out the paraffin lamp and returned to the solace of her blankets. Alone in her bed, the old woman fingered the rough beads of her rosary as the light of day slowly emerged from the darkness.

White Man Walking

John Eppel

He was striding down the pedestrian track between Ruskin Road and the Hillside School playing field. I was cycling in the other direction, on my way to Girls' College, which is situated in Suburbs. It was early, before the traffic build-up, so the road was pretty empty: one or two Townsend girls, their satchelled dresses riding up their back legs; a Milton boy with a crooked leg, taking his rest on the corner of Walpole Road; an old tramp with cataracts in his eyes, rummaging in dustbins for empty plastic bottles. And the ubiquitous pied crows.

It must have been late August because the *bauhinia variegata* – white, pink, and magenta – were in full flower; and from behind more than one ugly durawall wafted the sweet scent of buddleia. The mornings were still rather chilly so I was wearing my long-sleeved Rupert Bear jersey. He didn't seem to mind the cold since he wore only a thin khaki shirt with short sleeves rolled above his biceps, a tiny pair of faded blue rugby shorts, and veldskoens without socks or laces. He carried a walking stick, which looked more like a weapon in his hand. Slightly ahead of him, straining against a leather choker, was the biggest Staffordshire bull terrier I had ever seen. It was brindle in colour and it was the size of a ten gallon drum.

We exchanged glances: mine satirical, his contemptuous. I judged that he had recently retired and was learning to contend with empty hours, empty days, weeks, months ... Striding with his long, muscular legs, one slightly thinner and less muscular than the other: evidence of a rugby injury: snapped tendon perhaps, or torn cartilage. Wielding his stick rather than using it as a support. Searching the horizon, with half closed eyes, for challenges to his old boy vigour. Attached to the other knuckly hand, barely controlled, panting, eyes popping, was his correlate: an affectionate dog that liked nothing better than a good scrap with the wheel of a motor car slowing down.

Perhaps he had been sales manager for a spare parts factory; or senior representative for a company that built swimming pools; or chief security officer for a firm that specialized in burglar alarms.

Perhaps he had been a school teacher like me. Perhaps he had been to Rhodes University in South Africa and majored in Geography and Physical Education, with Sociology, Social Anthropology, and Bantu Law as fillers. I turned my head to look at him, but he did not turn his head to look at me. He had a soldier's bearing; I slouched, even on my bicycle, like a lily, straining after light, that had grown too heavy for its stem.

When next we passed each other, more or less the same time the following day, we exchanged slightly altered glances: mine curious, his amused. His full crop of hair, I noticed, was cut in such a way as to give maximum exposure to his ears, the lobes of which resembled brussel sprouts. Keloids. My hair was too long for my age, and for *the* age. Beatles style, it made me look a bit like John Lennon might have looked in middle age. His dog's pink tongue was foaming.

Our brief encounters went on for years, season after season. We shared the experience of cement durawalls going up and hibiscus hedges coming down. We shared the times with children dawdling to school, and domestic workers waiting outside locked gates; tramps and pied crows ransacking dustbins; the mingled suburban smells of floor polish, coal smoke, chrysanthemums, tomato plants, dog shit, and the exhaust fumes of cars that should long since have been taken off the road. And over the years our glances altered to looks of friendliness, accompanied with smiles and nods. His dog, no longer straining ahead, but lagging behind, greying muzzle, suppurating eyes, would recognize me and wag his stumpy tail.

Then, one day, he came alone, not wielding his walking stick but using it to support his damaged leg, which had been slowing him down, and bending him, by almost imperceptible degrees, through the years. No dog. I looked at him with sympathy and he looked at me, briefly, with embarrassment for his grief. The line of his jaw had begun folding into his neck. Like mine. Like mine, the skin around the muscles of his legs and arms had begun to loosen and sag. I noticed for the first time that he was wearing stockings, and that his shoes were tightly laced.

School holidays came and went, and when I resumed my school routine, I noticed that he was not on the road. Day after day, no sign of

him. The poinsettias were particularly grand that wintry season. I fantasized that he must once have adored scarlet lips like that: Rita Hayworth's in his case; Sylvia Plath's in mine.

He was my analogue, and I missed him.

It must have been a good two months later – the jacarandas were coming out – that I saw him again, and I was shocked at what I saw. The once challenging stride had been reduced to a shuffle. When he saw me he smiled sheepishly and tried to straighten his back, but only his dewlap reacted. He was streaming saliva, and his eyes were lustreless. But there he was, on the pedestrian track between Ruskin Road and the Hillside school playing field, shuffling along in slippers and pyjamas, and a cordless dressing gown.

And he was there the next day, and the next. And we smiled at each other and wordlessly acknowledged the beauty of the jacaranda blossom and, a month later, the flamboyants on Kipling Drive. When the harvester ants came out we looked at each other knowingly – a sign of rain. He used the point of his stick to poke gently at chongololos, to see if they would curl up (girls), or writhe on their backs (boys). Once, a passing crow crapped on his head and, for the first time we communicated with laughter, silent though it was.

The last time I saw him, before I changed schools and therefore routes, a miniature fox terrier trotted at his heels, a mere puppy, and, when it saw me on my bike, it growled. He winked at me and shuffled on his way. Not so the dog. It charged at me and sank its little teeth into the back tyre of my bicycle. I screamed at it to let go, and I could have sworn I heard the old man chuckle.

The Little House

Spencer Crewe

God's Stepchildren are scattered throughout Southern Africa, with the loving abandon only He can sow. From the fairest Cape to the mighty Zambezi we flowered and gave colour to a part of the continent dominated by two shades of the colour spectrum. My little patch of heaven lay some two hundred and sixty miles from the muddy Limpopo and one hundred from the Bechuanaland border, in a much named country that experienced all kinds of trouble before it hiccupped at Lancaster House, flinging out the old order, who believed they might be in power for a thousand years, and ushering in a new order with the same ideas about relinquishing power. In 1946, soon after another chap with the same predictions was dying in a bunker for the very same reasons, I, not wanting to leave the safest haven in the world, was, owing to my mother's contractions, arriving head first on planet earth. I landed softly on the inner sprung mattress of the master bedroom at 4020 Isingagrove, Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. The Grove was a pleasant village of thirty-five homes by the time it had reached its limit, enclosed by large factories to the east and west, a river to the south and the Brickfield homesteads to the west.

In 1944, to this bit of suburbia, well hidden away from the white man, whose sensibilities may have been disturbed if a non-white should live next door, came those who had lived in the servants' quarters of the more endowed. Apartheid was alive and kicking when I barged into the world. No street name for our castle, only a dirt track that sinewed the back of Mono Steel (Pvt) Ltd; the rest of the village serviced by the same earthen ways.

My arrival was the cause of much excitement and celebration. Our maid announced to my sisters rushing home from school, in her best Chilalapapa, the lingua franca of Southern Africa, that a 'box' had arrived. Putting two and two together, the four girls put on morespeed, their squeals of joy rising above Mono Steel's hooter summoning employees back to work. A brother at last. Racing home they dashed

into our parents' tiny bedroom to peer at the little brother, safe in Mum's olive textured arms; the coloured midwife shooing them out after a while.

My delivery had not been an easy one because of my large head. My sisters, I later heard, were all slightly perturbed by my odd shaped cranium, which had assumed a distinct pear shape, in the effort needed to expel me from the safety of the womb. The family's anxiety regarding my cranial proportions was to some extent allayed by the good doctor, who explained that my skull would return to normal. Some unbelievers took His word with the proverbial pinch of salt, only believing in his wisdom many months later.

Our little castle, situated directly behind the smoke belching factory, consisted of two tiny bedrooms, a dining room cum lounge and a kitchen into which we just managed to squeeze. Everything was extra small with all of us, especially when Jenny, my eldest sister, came home from boarding school. The sleeping arrangements were: my parents in one room, the four girls in the other and I, Spencer Derby Collins, in the dining room cum lounge. Besides the lack of space, one's only bit of privacy was the lavatory situated in the south-western extremity of the back yard. Our lav, a metre by metre and a half building, walled with dull face brick that added to its forlornness, formed part of the thick milk hedge that enclosed the rear of our property. As soon as I was off the potty, I was encouraged to visit this out-house. My earliest memories of home dwell invariably on this building and its unplastered interior, with its rudimentary flushing system operated by a long lever, from which hung a chain ending in the metal stirrup one yanked on to empty the contents of the ceramic bowl.

It took all kinds of prayer, whistling and loud singing to visit yon den of relief at night, once the potty had been hidden away from me. No amount of moonlight dispelled the fear I felt once the lavatory door closed. A candle was a waste of time, the slightest draught put paid to its wavering security. Mostly, I sat with the door wide open in case I had to leave suddenly. My sisters, not averse to scaring the living daylight out of me when they had the chance, were twice as terrified of this Black Hole of Calcutta, insisting that I, supposedly the

biggest coward of the lot, now all of six years of age, stand guard at a suitable distance, while they got down to business. One moonlit night, as I loitered on guard duty, leaning comfortably against a gum pole supporting the chicken coop, Harold, our rooster of the moment, screamed loudly at the moon. A foot away from my ear, he almost caused my early demise from coronary failure. Disorientated by the adrenaline of fear, I fled towards the toilet first, only changing direction when the occupant yelled at me. Doing a three hundred and sixty degree turn, I took off for the kitchen from the portal of which streamed electric light and safety, yelling louder than Harold, who had fallen off his perch in fright, creating a helluva racket. My sister, trapped in the confines of the Hole, panicked at the commotion going on outside, had to end operations and follow close behind in a state of undress. Man that place was only safe during broad daylight.

Most times we just laughed at our fear, after tumbling into the safety of the kitchen, but when some poor devil had the runs it was pure hell for the sibling on guard duty, stuck in the open, listening to the wind whistling through the hedge and the other night sounds reminiscent of Hwange National Park's lions padding in the lane. The incumbent with the bad tummy would be asked in a low voice, designed not to arouse the ghosts, lions, murderers or thieves resident in and around this area, 'Aren't you finished yet?' It was not unknown for the occupant to burst into tears if the guard detail made off.

The Chronicle and *The Sunday Mail* were much revered in our home when the Collins' budget was under serious strain. Cut into toilet paper size and pierced with a suitable piece of wire, they were hung strategically at eye level for the occupants' easy access and odd reading. Many a politician felt what I thought of them many years later as I cleaned my bottom with their pictures.

The yard sloped gently and, over the years, the soil around the lavatory built up and, come November, rainwater lapped six inches past our ankles. This state of affairs was not appreciated by the females of the house, who descended on Dad en masse, demanding the anomaly be rectified as soon as possible. Under great pressure, Dad the tailor, producer of bespoke suits, raised the entrance with a row of bricks and knocked out an exit for excess water by removing

two of the forlorn building's bricks at ground level, allowing overflow to the lane which separated our home from the next row of homes in the village. Dad, it turned out, had gone to Tiger Kloof College in South Africa to become a builder, transferring to the Tailoring Department after he fell off a scaffold.

The row of houses we lived in were all devoid of the luxury of having an indoor toilet and bathroom and suffered the same inconveniences we did. We were all envious of those homes that boasted mod cons, including hot water at the turn of a tap. The space separating us from the more fortunate in housing amenities was called a sanitary lane and had been laid out to suit the smallest of vehicles, namely a mule drawn wagon that collected household refuse. In the good old days, these wagons collected raw sewage from toilets, which had cast iron pots under the seat that were pulled out by a council worker and dumped noisily in the cart. Bulawayo City Council imported workers from far off Binga on the Zambezi to perform this task. The Ndebele considered shitty work like this taboo. Happily this mode of sanitizing the city was long gone and we, the inhabitants of the Grove, were blessed with pipes that ran into even bigger canals deep underground, speeding the effluent to the sewage ponds near Umgusa.

Personally I detested the little house in the back yard for the fear it caused in my journey to it at night. Constipation, along with almost malarial sweats, plagued me for many years in my forced journey to our lavatory. For at least two decades, we tramped to and fro until Dad finally saved up enough to add an indoor toilet to our home.

The Little House is an excerpt from Spencer Crewe's unpublished novel *Zimbabwean Odyssey*.

Evil That Fathers Do

Mathew Chokuwenga

The door squeaked as it slowly opened. In two or three pulses it lost its movement and its irritating noise died. An adult size figure in complete blackness that the darkness of the room had given him, almost tiptoeing, entered the room and its darkness. In a few steps he found the bed and sat himself first, before slipping into the blankets to lie, his face to the roof.

After lying still and silent for a while, he moved his hand, hesitantly as if he was to pet the head of a strange dog, towards the subject that lay almost lifeless with its back to him. Outside the night was so dark and not completely silent. Just there and then an owl sang an owl song and the night filled with a feeling of evil and fear filled the hearts of those who heard its song. Fear of the dark, fear of the unknown.

The hand found its subject. The subject froze. The hand began to caress the subject, the subject that gathered its small bones together, tightly coiling itself like a millipede in rejection and fear of the hand and its master. The adult figure drew itself closer to the small, fragile and raw bones that made up the child being of Chipu. Many tears had already flowed from the child's eyes and sunk into her soft blue pillow. The past two nights had been hell for her. Nights of horror, pain and despair.

The child shivered and cried softly. She was so much of a child that even her chest had not yet bloomed. Suddenly sound was born in this mute room. The adult spoke. His voice roaring like a lion's. "If you ever tell your mother or anyone else I will kill you, I will cut you into a hundred pieces, you hear? You know that big knife of mine, that's the one I will use on you. Even if you tell anyone, they cannot do anything to me because I'm your father. I own you." His words finished and he continued with his evil.

Longings

Judy Maposa

I long for the wide open spaces
Where my spirit soars
Forgetting the body
Seeing only the blue, the green
The intoxicating clear air

I merge with the sky
Billow with the cool breezes
Frolic with the butterfly
Drink with the bee
Sweet nectar from multi-coloured cups.

The rainbow peeping
Through half-shut lashes, the sun
So bright, so warming, scattering
The languor of my thoughts
To a delicious ecstasy

Green, the colour of life
I am a leaf shimmering in the sun,
Playing to the wind,
Making the music with the wind

How I long to be out of this box,
To soar in total abandon
Like the swallow on wings of freedom
Gliding near the heavens,
Bathing on the tips of clouds.

I long to be the thunder cloud,
Full, pregnant, gloriously cascading
My millions of diamonds.
I roar up my fullness, spilling my frustration
And at last spent, let the sun view
My accomplishment.

I am the root, thirstily sucking
The rich wetness from the earth.
I move, unseen, unheard, a fragile thing
Searching the veins of my womb.

I long to be the spirit of rebirth
A sprout, inexorably seeking life,
Cracking the hard dry earth
Ultimately bursting into the freedom
And fray of life.

The shoot in springtime
From the black leafless branch
A fist that slowly opens
Into a colourful blossom

I become the beautiful tree
Tartly robed, giving off heady scents
Attracting, I am the flower
Pleasing the eye, delighting the nose
Adorning the landscape,
Revelling at my short-lived noon
And gracefully withering away.

I long to be the happy midday dream
Of the lizard basking in the sun
My eyes glazed, mere slits
And my limbs hugging
The warm unfeeling rock.

I am the long shadows of the afternoon
Cool, inviting after hours of toiling;
Lulling, luring
Into a perfect dreamless siesta

I am the red sunset bringing
Ethereal moods of faraway places,
Ushering in the twilight world.
I rise and become one
With the golden cloud of dust
Thrown up by a herd of lazily content cattle,
Returning from pasture.

Rising higher still, I mingle
With the shrill voices of women,
Deftly balancing buckets
Of water on slender necks,
Parting at forking little paths
Bidding each other goodnight.

I am the leaping tongues
Of the evening fire, glowing orange
Throwing fearful shadows on walls.
The intensity of the storyteller,
With eye fixed on the heart of my flames
Seemingly reading the thread
Of my tale in my heated depths

I am the hoot of the owl
Sending shivers of apprehension
Into superstitious hearts.
I carry far into the silent dark night,
A thing insubstantial, to be received
And answered by a female companion
Resting in a leafy darkness

I am the big silvery eye
Of a full moon, surveying
A surreal nocturnal world
Lonely, different and yet fully alive,
If only understood.
My glare awakes its deep senses
Stirring a recognition of an older world,
Of spirits, arousing
The strain of madness to fever pitch.

I become the whisperings of true lovers,
Sweet, fuelling passions
Flattering in their sincerity.
The secret groaning of carnal desires,
Satiated and fulfilled,
Finally glorying in pagan abandon.

I roam the world like a ghost
That has long lost its way
Dispassionately viewing man
Abandoned in the vulnerability of sleep
Bestowing a cold kiss on a ruddy cheek here,
Scowling on one insomniac soul there.

I am the nightmare of a guilt-ridden soul,
Whispering, “confess, confess
For therein lies your peace”,
Insolent and stubborn,
Wrenching out promises made in darkness
That dispel with the approach of light.

I am the freshness of dawn
Full of promise, of hopes
And new beginnings.
I rise with the morning sun
A never ending rhythm, the essence of life.

Ever Smart

Pete Hutton

A cat jumped up and knocked the sculpture over. The head and neck broke off. I was very sad. The tortoise torso is still attached to the legs and stands there with the little arms curling round over the belly. But the lizard-tortoise head on its long neck lies on the ground. The wood at the collarbone was thin and weak, that's why it broke. I tried half-heartedly to repair it a few times. No luck. 'Ever Smart' it's called, written on the base in felt tip pen, along with the sculptor's name, Wilson Sibanda. Yes – it's a very smart looking tortoise, standing up on its two elegant human legs with its neat jacket of black and pink chequers, and politely tucked in arms. But headless.

I can hear the soft calming chip chip chip of chisel on wood, smell the oily green scent of new cut logs and waxy scent of the shoe polish used for colouring, see the untidy piles of paperbark timber in one corner of the workshop, and the crowd of carved figures standing together in a grotesque gallery of waving limbs, cricked necks, splayed legs, hunchbacks, staring eyes, turtle torsos, black jackets, rudely poked out bottoms, Siamese twin bodies, double heads. And I can see the sculptors, squatting on the ground bent over their pieces of wood, chopping out the first rough scallops, turning the twisted logs around and around to sense a form emerging: a two-headed lizard on a plump man's body, a dog-faced beast holding a dwarf man upside down and inspecting his buttocks, a cat-headed gentleman clutching the lapels of his coat, a tall figure with a round mask of a face, his arm stretched out to harbour a row of identical smiling heads.

A tortoise with a long skinny neck, folding his hands shyly over his smart chequered jacket. Ever Smart.

That was some years ago, when they were full of hope and ideas and comic new sculptures appeared from their hands every day. That was when I knew them all by name and they gave me huge welcoming

smiles when I came in, holding up their new carvings. Barnabas, Isaiah, Thulani, Nkosana, Happison.

Wilson.

He was the small one, dark little eyes in a bony face, a look of anxious puzzlement breaking open into a happy grin when I came over and shook his hand and said something such as, “I like that piece Wilson. What do you call it?” He was particularly happy when I asked, “How much is this one?” His face was too small for the joyous smile that split it in two, and he said, “Ah, for you only two hundred. It’s called ‘African Celebrator’. It’s a very nice one, very nice.” His sculptures were the most unusual, the most humorous. They were usually beast-humans. That was his point really, so simple: the beast in man.

The other sculptors were self-contained, hopeful for a sale, but always proud enough to carry on working and leave me to myself. I liked them all. Wilson though was always so eager, eager to be attentive, eager to show his work, eager to hear my praise. Yet he was the best sculptor, so had least need to seek approval (but of course he did not know he was the best). And I liked him most, for his talent and insecurity and enormous smile. I really liked him.

Years have passed. Things have gone wrong. The sculptors are still there, sitting among their wood shavings and chips on the floor of the workshop, sometimes coming outside into the sun on cooler winter days. But they all seem to carry cell phones now and spend as much time ringing people as carving. And their work has become stale and repetitive: the figures are no longer so comically contorted, so rude, so colourfully painted, so imbued with the character of the piece of wood they were born from. They are stiff statues in terribly formal jackets, little businessmen, created to a formula. They stand in rows like timid conformists and I very seldom bother to come and look at them these days. Economic collapse has killed off the buyers, and the tourists who used to drift in every day, to laugh and exclaim in delight, to weave around the gallery of gargoyles on the floor and choose their

favourite and spill the money cheerfully from their laden purses, and chatter in their confident tourist manner to these quiet African carvers – these tourists have abandoned the country, frightened off by its leaders, frightened off by the beast in man.

And Wilson has gone. That's what has really gone wrong.

He went away to the God-forsaken, malaria-infested, hot, poor, overcrowded rural area where his family home was. He continued sculpting there and sometimes reappeared in the city to try to sell his work to the art gallery shop, or any likely looking passing tourist, and to see his old friends in the workshop. I would occasionally run into him on the entrance steps of the gallery, and we would exchange warm greetings, hold each other's hands in long affectionate grasp. I noticed that the rural home did not seem to be good for his health – he looked thinner each time, his face even bonier, his speech a little croaky and quavery. Once, he popped up beside me in the auction to ask how much he should bid for the bicycle just in front of us. I looked at him in surprise, not just because I never expected to see him in the auction, but because he did not look remotely fit enough to ride a bicycle. He looked arthritic and was leaning on a walking stick.

"Is it for yourself?" I asked.

"Yes. I *want* it." He smiled his broad smile, as if he already had it.

"Not less than three thousand dollars, I would say."

His smile vanished.

"So much! Do you think so? Ah no. It's too much for me."

A few more words together, the bicycle went for four thousand, he tottered off out of my life again.

Sometimes the city centre seems the happiest place on earth to be. The sun is gentle and all the black skins glow as I weave through them.

Girls are dressed up and parade like models, with hair swinging in long braids; men with tough looks soften into friendliness as their eyes meet mine; tiny children as clean and neat as dolls clutch the hands of mummies and daddies and stare around astonished with open mouths; old people in city best, the men topped with quaint Homburgs, study shop windows; a Morris Oxford from the sixties slowly eases into a parking space and people move aside respectfully; the Apostolic Faith ladies, gleaming white and so innocent, twirl their parasols and whisper “money change?” as if offering illicit sex. Africa looks content, harmonious and good.

On such a day I went to the art gallery. I noticed an old rucksack propped up outside against the steps, stuffed full, and next to it a large polythene bag, also stuffed with something. They both had a lumpy look, as if dismembered limbs were the contents. I went up the steps and through the grand entrance, so familiar after my years of coming and going, and heard a quavery voice, so eager I could not mistake it.

Wilson.

But speech would not come out of my mouth. I felt choked. I wanted to turn and leave and never look back. Wilson was dying.

I had to smile – a smile forced from my dark misery. I had to speak, but knew not what to speak.

“Wilson! Good to see you.” I have never said such dishonest words.

I had to look at him and tell myself, yes this is Wilson and he is dying. I knew why. I had always known why. Everyone knows in Africa.

A walking frame supported the bent over body, so bent that he had to twist up his neck to look at me. He twisted slightly sideways; it was easier. His limbs were completely stiff. His face, the skin taut over the cheekbones and the eyes sunken, smiled at me, the same huge smile that split it in two. As if nothing had changed. He moved towards me by flicking the walking frame a few inches forward and then dropping

his weight onto it, and I felt horrified at this jerking creature advancing on me. He was a person with almost everything sucked out of him, except the excitement in his eyes and the joyful smile – as if I was going to save him. I remembered that I had not even been able to help him buy the bicycle he wanted so much.

I had to walk to him, to stretch out my hand. I did not expect him to have the strength to stretch out his hand to mine, but he managed somehow, gripping it as tightly as he could to feel my health and vigour. He wanted to lead me outside and he set off, jerking the walking frame ahead of him. I helped him down the steps.

“How’s life in Mandaya, Wilson?” Mandaya, the hellish ‘Siberia’ where he lived, was the last place on earth I wanted to hear about, but I could think of no other subject of conversation.

“Mandaya is O.K.”

“And are you making sculptures?” I nearly slipped in the word ‘still’, but an impulse made me leave it out. Why does one become so dishonest when talking to a dying person?

“I’m making sculptures,” he echoed. “I want to show you these ones. I hope you will like them. I’m selling.”

The stuffed bags were his of course, and he told me to pull everything out. So I disentangled the turtles in suits from the writhing little beasts and the businessmen with multiple heads. They were so packed together that I had to wrestle with them while he watched me, smiling hopefully, leaning over his walking frame and looking exhausted with the effort of staying alive. As I sorted them out and stood them up to form a small gathering on the pavement, feeling oddly embarrassed as passing pedestrians looked curiously at us, I realised that he had become one of his sculptures: a contorted little figure, only precariously still on his feet, on the point of tumbling over as the sculptures so often did. I could not imagine how he had managed to

carve these.

The sculptures were small and had lost the energy and humour they used to have. They were dying with him. These were his wooden friends, going with him into the darkness.

I had no money with me, but I knew that this was not the reason I was not going to buy a sculpture. It was simply that I did not want to have a memory of Wilson as he approached death. Also, I was determined not to be sentimental and buy one just out of pity, or just for old time's sake. That would be like admitting the truth to him – and I was still being dishonest. He croaked at one point that I did not have to buy one if I did not see one I liked. He would never have said that in the past, but nor would he have pushed me to buy.

He was looking nervous, as, he told me, he was expecting another of his old patrons to meet him here soon. I told him I was not going to buy anything, saying that my house was already full of his sculptures, which was true. He seemed too listless to mind and was probably hoping for better luck with the other person, so I began to cram the sculptures back into the bags – or tried to. They did not want to go back in, as if the darkness of the bag was their doom, and I tugged and pushed more roughly, almost in a panic. But an arm stuck out here, an elbow there, a bottom here. The last one would not go in. Its base poked out and I saw its title crudely written there in felt tip pen. It was called 'AIDS Inspection'.

The last I saw of Wilson was his crooked figure hunched over the walking frame, his eyes, swallowed up in their sockets, anxiously searching for someone or something in the crowds and his two bags beside him, lumpy with the deformed little companions he was dragging round in his final months of life.

I have decided to try once more to repair Ever Smart.

The Hand of Darkness

Christopher Mlalazi

Tsano Khaya cursed silently to himself under his breath at the sweltering Bulawayo summer weather as he wiped his sweaty brow with the back of his hand.

Goddamit, if only it could rain, maybe the rain would cool this blasted heat. And the pavement hordes didn't help any. He hated them. They depressed him. They made movement along the pavement a mammoth task for him.

Tsano was built like an elephant. His stomach was huge, it rolled when he walked and his hanging jowls wobbled. To make matters worse, for a man endowed with such an enormous girth, his legs were amazingly stork-like, as if he walked on stilts, like one of those fearsome standaris that dance in township beerhalls every Sunday afternoon.

He loathed the way people always stared, not at his face, but at his obese body, their various expressions ranging from amusement, surprise, to utter disgust. And he had a chronic fear of finely bodied young men – he despised their sneers. Some pavement denizens even had the nerve to openly point fingers at him and discuss him in loud voices. It hurt. One plastic bag vendor had remarked to a fellow vendor in a loud voice as Tsano rolled by; “Jesus H. Christ! He must be the bogey man who blocks the township sewers!” The remark had been followed by hysterical mbanje laughter. Poor scum. Didn't they know he was a millionaire; that he could employ all of them to do whatever he wanted.

Tsano walked into Hillside Department Store. He breathed a heavy sigh of relief as the air-conditioned interior of the cavernous shop hit him, as a weary desert traveller comes to an oasis. Pity there was no bar inside here where he could quench his mammoth thirst. He laboriously manoeuvred his way past the rows of clothing towards the cosmetics counter, amused shoppers parting to let him pass, lest he roll over them.

A beautiful young woman, with a petite body, dressed in the latest

fashions, stood behind the cosmetics counter. She raised pencil thin eyebrows at Tsano. Tsano placed a magazine he was carrying on to the glass counter. He pointed a stubby finger at a small bottle of after-shave on a shelf behind the young woman. Around his wrist was a gold watch that matched the gold chain around his thick neck. He was dressed in a gaudy print shirt, loose khaki linen trousers and leather sandals.

“How much is Dracho?” his rubbery face was expressionless.

“Ten thousand dollars, sir.” The young woman did not even bother to turn around and look at the bottle. She was about the same age as Tsano’s only daughter, who was at a finishing school in France.

“Ten thousand dollars for a bottle of smelly water!” Tsano snorted, then abruptly walked away from the cosmetics counter, cleaving his way through the throngs of shoppers like a battle tank.

He headed for the exit, his eyes steeling for the harsh glare of the sun outside. He sneered at the security guard who stood at the exit eyeing his obese body, his eyes glinting with amusement below the peak of his service cap.

“Mantshingelani,” Tsano mocked him in a low voice from the corner of his mouth as he passed him.

“Sidudla!” the security guard instantly replied.

Zizi, the cosmetics assistant, surreptitiously glanced around the shop from under her fake eyelashes. Nobody was looking in her direction. She picked up the magazine Tsano had left on the counter and rolled it in her hand. Leaving her counter, she headed for the Ladies.

Inside, she opened the magazine. Between the pages was an envelope containing a stack of five hundred dollar bills. \$15,000. Excellent. There was a note inside the envelope. She quickly read it. “Hi Zizi, my beautiful tipoti. Missing you like sugar in tea. Please come to big daddy tonight and scratch my big tummy. Will be anxiously awaiting you with my romantic red light on. Lots and lots of smooches! ME.”

Good. She tucked the money into her bra and walked out, smirking at her reflection in the mirror.

In the Hillside Shopping Centre car park, Tsano manoeuvred his bulky frame between the parked cars to his white 'C' class Benz. A ragged street kid, with raw red lips and a dazed look in his bloodshot weary eyes, hovered around the expensive car like a fly around a plate of white sadza. Tsano threw him a coin and the boy expertly caught it in mid air, tossed it up again, caught it again, kissed it and pocketed it.

Tsano had his car door open when a heavy hand descended on his shoulder from behind.

"A moment with you, son of Khaya," a soft voice said as he turned around. The face that met his eyes was not familiar. It was that of a middle-aged man. The face had an inner serenity about it, that of a man at peace with his soul. He was dressed in a simple brown suit that did not say much about him. "You don't know me, son of Khaya, but I ask you to hear me out please," the man said in a low voice.

Tsano was too taken aback to reply. Who was this man, and how did he know his name? A sixth sense warned Tsano not to have anything to do with this stranger, but, before he could get away, the stranger said, "Disease follows you like your shadow, son of Norolon Khaya of Tshongwe village. A great calamity is about to befall you, son of the beautiful maiden, Loveness Siziba."

Tsano's mouth dropped open in shock. "Ah!" he cried out. Those were the names of his late father and mother. His parents had both met gruesome deaths during the colonial era at the hands of the army, for allegedly assisting 'terrorists'.

The stranger was not finished. "The bad luck emanates from your house. Search very carefully, great son of the wise Khaya, within your soul and within your house. An evil object, that spells the downfall of all that you treasure, has been put under a seat in your house by those who hate you."

With that, the stranger turned around and walked away. He disappeared into the Shopping Centre without looking back.

Tsano heaved a deep breath, a perplexed look suffusing his fleshy countenance. Absentmindedly, he slid behind the steering wheel of the Benz and pulled the door shut.

He started the car and drove towards his house, a few streets away

on Jacaranda Street. Tsano was one of the richest men in the City of Kings. He owned a thriving long distance bus company, a fleet of taxis and two bottle stores in the rural areas. He liked to refer to himself as a business tycoon.

As he drove along the leafy streets of Hillside, he was still thinking about the stranger who had accosted him in the car park. A tingle crept up his spine, unexplained. There had been something weird about that man, something supernatural, an aura that pulsed off his body. Could he be a conman? But that was impossible. The man had not tried to weasel anything out of him, only imparted his advice, then beat it. Nothing sinister about that. Maybe he was one of those chancers trying to get close to him, or just be seen talking to him. He was such a big man about town, both financially and physically. Even the most beautiful whores around town knew him – he smiled and forgot about the episode as he came to the imposing electric gates of his mansion.

Zizi Khabo arrived at Tsano's house at 8pm in her purple Fiat Uno. As usual, they did not go anywhere. Tsano's wife had died two years before, leaving a big gap in his heart, which he tried to fill with a succession of women. With his daughter away in France, he lived alone, apart from his four servants, who were hidden behind a high wall at the back of the mansion in their quarters. Well away from sight.

When Zizi left, Tsano was drained of energy and he immediately fell into a deep sleep, his heavy snores of satisfaction rasping through the slumbering empty house. The following morning, as he left the bathroom after a warm shower, whistling happily to himself – that was the effect Zizi's young body had on him – he suddenly remembered the stranger of yesterday, and the whistle died abruptly on his lips.

“An evil object, that spells the downfall of all that you treasure, has been put under a seat in your house by those who hate you.” The words seemed to echo around the house, as if they had just been said.

A towel around his waist, he entered the living room, determined to end the matter there and then. He started lifting all the seats in the living room one by one, peering carefully underneath them. Ten

minutes later, sweating profusely and breathing hard, he was through with the task, and he had not discovered anything.

“An evil thing under your seat,” he sneered. “Fat chance, chancer.”

As he headed for his bedroom, he noticed that the cushion of his favourite rocking chair was askew. He went back and pulled it up, meaning to place it properly. Tsano’s heart lurched painfully and he screamed.

A skeletal hand, a human hand, lay underneath the cushion. On the wrist was a bracelet of black, red and white beads, reeking of potent black magic.

He threw the cushion aside and belted into his bedroom, locking himself inside, his heart hammering dangerously. He frantically pulled open the bedside drawer and, with trembling hands, took out his pistol, which he pointed at the door, as if he expected a fiend to push it open and come in to devour him. His body was shaking all over, and cold sweat streamed down his face

After a few minutes, sanity began to return to Tsano. He cautiously unlocked, then opened the bedroom door, the gun gripped in his hand. He screwed up his courage and tiptoed towards the sofa. Standing a safe distance away, he peered at the seat, his obese body poised for instant flight. Sure enough, the loathsome object was a human hand. At the sight of it, Tsano felt his stomach slide sickeningly, and he found himself short of breath again.

Lord God! That man at the Shopping Centre had been right! He was doomed. The devil was after him. He had to find that man again. But where to find him? The most logical place to start the search was at the Shopping Centre. The thing had to be removed from his house and destroyed, and it had to be destroyed carefully by an experienced muti man. The stranger would know best. He had to, for wasn’t it him who had first warned about the muti? Tsano knew and feared the power of muti. Muti was dangerous, highly dangerous, it could destroy a man, completely destroy his life. With a cold shiver, he wondered how long it had been lying there, how many times he had unknowingly sat over it and who hated him so much as to do that to him. Obviously one of his jealous relatives – those were a’plenty –

jealous of his thriving business, nice suburban house and posh car.

He picked up the living room phone and phoned the servants' quarters.

"MaTshuma!" he shouted into the phone. "I don't want anyone in the main house today, do you understand me? Nobody must come in, otherwise there will be hell to pay. You can all take the day off for all I care, BUT DON'T COME TO THE MAIN HOUSE!" Tsano's sagging stomach quivered as he spoke.

"I understand Mr Khaya," maTshuma replied, her voice fearful. Tsano banged the receiver down.

As soon as he was fully dressed, he drove to the Shopping Centre. After parking, he just sat in his car, his eyes fixed on the entrance.

An hour passed. Two hours passed. Four hours passed. Still Tsano sat in his car, its air conditioning cooling the interior, his eyes fixed on the entrance as if his life depended on the very act. Finally, at noon, he saw the man walking out. Tsano's heart tripped.

He scrambled out of his car and gave chase. When he caught up with the man, he grabbed his arm. The man turned around.

"Yes?" his eyebrows were raised. There was a far away look in his eyes, as if he was studying some vision in his mind.

"We met yesterday!" Tsano whispered to the man urgently, his voice still breathless from the unused to running.

"Yes?" the man replied again. His face was cool and composed, as if he knew all the ways of the world, and none of them bothered him. Today he was wearing a simple grey suit that did not say much about him.

"I need your advice about what we talked about yesterday. Please."

The man was silent for a moment. He regarded Tsano with his seer's eyes. Then he spoke. "Is there anywhere where we can talk privately, son of Khaya?" His voice was gentle and kind and it promised instant salvation for Tsano's troubled heart.

"Yes, yes, in my car" Tsano pointed at his car in the parking lot. "Please come." He more or less pulled the stranger towards his car.

Out of the flaming sun and inside the cool and private interior of the car, the two men stared at each other.

“Who are you?” Tsano blurted out.

“Listen carefully, son of Khaya. You are no longer a child, but a man who is both wise and courageous. And with your intelligence you are aware that all the things we see with our eyes are only a tiny fraction of the great answer. Do not ask who I am, but only how I can assist you, as my name does not matter much in the upper world.”

“How can you help me, Nameless One?” A tiny flicker of hope flared deep in Tsano’s eyes.

The stranger took Tsano’s hand in his. He turned it over and looked at the palm for a moment. Suddenly, his eyeballs upended, and the brown pupils disappeared, like somebody dying. A strange cracking voice, that of an old man, issued forth from his lips. “Son of Norolon Khaya, grandson of Mzimba Khaya.” A cry came from Tsano’s lips as he heard his long departed grandfather’s name. “A painful disease recently visited your house that took your other half and left a great hole in your heart. Now your house knows not the songs of a woman preparing food for her beloved husband.” Something tore painfully in Tsano’s heart as his late wife was referred to. He had loved her so much. “You are alone and you are very afraid, and this fear draws evil close to both you and your daughter across the seas. You have soiled yourself and the name of your clan by fornicating with a child, offering her large presents of money to knowingly break down her will, because she is poorer than you.” Tsano thought guiltily of Zizi’s young body under his. “I am your grandfather Mzimba Khaya, blood of my blood. Lead me to your house and I shall destroy the hand of darkness and set you free, son of my son.”

With that, the stranger’s eyes rolled down and became normal again. He released Tsano’s hand. Silence reigned in the car, thick and mysterious. A bee banged itself crazily against the closed window, as if it wanted entry into the interior in order to elaborate on something that had been left unsaid. Tsano was staring at the man beside him, at a loss for words, with awe in his eyes.

“I am leaving now,” the stranger said, abruptly breaking the silence. “Goodbye, son of Khaya.”

Tsano opened his mouth in dismay. “But ...”

“But what?”

“You just said you are going to destroy the thing in my house!”

“Oh, did I say that?”

“Yes you did!”

“So that was the instruction. I see. Now take me to your house, son of Khaya. But before we go, I must warn you that you must not expect too much from me. I am not a n’anga, just an ordinary man endowed with psychic powers that enable me to see and explain, but not to solve, unless the instruction says otherwise. Whatever is in your house may be too powerful for my powers.”

Tsano started the car and the ‘C’ class pulled majestically out of the parking lot.

Tsano and the stranger stood before the rocking chair, staring at the hand lying there. The cushion still lay across the room where Tsano had thrown it in his fright in the morning. The house seemed to Tsano as gloomy as a mortuary, and a strange dark smell seemed to pervade the room.

The Nameless One reached into his jacket pocket and took out a sprig of herb. He put it in his mouth, chewed on it and spat explosively into his hands. He remained silent, whilst slowly rubbing his hands together, like a bare-fist pugilist contemplating a serious fray. Then, his brow furrowed in serious concentration, he slowly reached out a hand towards the object.

Just as he was about to touch it, he sharply jerked his hand back, as if something had bitten it, uttered a sharp involuntary cry of surprise, and bolted towards the door, the tails of his suit jacket flying. He skidded to a halt at the door, with a breathless Tsano right behind him. The two men stood by the door clutching each other, their breathing laboured.

After he had extricated himself from Tsano’s arms and controlled his breathing, The Nameless One spoke, his voice distressed. “I can’t, son of Khaya. I just can’t! This muti is too powerful for me. I am not used to this type. If I touch it, I risk transferring the bad luck it carries, which is meant for you, to myself and my family,” he blew on his hands. “I have a big family.”

“Please please help me, Nameless One!” Tsano pleaded. “Please help me.” He started sobbing. “Oh God, what have I done to deserve all this?” His voice was thin and his cheeks glistened with tears.

“Listen, son of Khaya,” The Nameless One spoke. “If you want my assistance in this grave matter, you will have to pay me for it. If the bad luck this muti carries does transfer to me, I shall need to be cleansed by a powerful n’anga in Mozambique. Cleansing of this kind doesn’t come cheap. And Mozambique is far away, son of Khaya.”

“Just get rid of it, I will give you anything that you want.” Tsano took a handkerchief out of his trouser pocket, wiped his cheeks and blew his nose.

“What exactly will you give me, son of Khaya?”

“I will give you one of my buses, a new one.”

“A bus! No, I don’t want a bus. Buses overturn on bridges.”

“What do you want then?” Tsano was feeling sick. So much had happened today.

“I want money, son of Khaya.”

“Money? How much?”

“How much money do you have in your bank Mr Khaya? And please don’t lie to me. I have ways of knowing.”

Tsano hesitated.

“How much?” The Nameless One firmly prodded.

“Twenty million dollars or so.”

“And you are going to give me five million dollars, in cash.” The Nameless One instantly said.

“Five million!” Tsano was aghast.

“No less. This is a dangerous job you have asked me to do for you – against my will. It’s either that, or you remain with that thing and risk losing everything – all your money and maybe your life. What is five million dollars out of twenty million, son of Khaya? Not even a drop in the ocean.”

“Okay okay, I will give you the money. Just get this thing out of my life!” Tsano said resignedly, his cheeks and shoulders dropping in dejection.

“You must give me the money before I destroy the muti, son of Khaya. In fact, I have to travel to far away rural areas to find the herb

that has the power to destroy this muti. I shall be gone for two days. Have the money ready by then. Let's meet here in two days time. And please don't sleep in this house from today onwards, or let anybody into the house, until I have destroyed the muti. Don't even tell anyone about it, or sleep with a woman, or that will work against you. Do you understand, son of Khaya?"

"Yes I understand you," Tsano agreed, nodding his head for emphasis. "I shall stay at the Holiday Inn until you come back, Nameless One. And I shall have your money ready. How do you want it?"

"In new five hundred dollar bills, and packed into a new leather travelling bag – the property of amadlozi must always be carried in new and good things you know."

Two days later, The Nameless One was back. Tsano was waiting for him on the stoep of his mansion, a leather bag containing the five million dollars in his hand. The Nameless One carried a bright red briefcase in one hand and a small ceremonial knobkerrie in the other. They went into the house. The Nameless One placed his briefcase on a table in the living room and opened it. Inside was a whisk made from the tail of an animal, a small plastic sachet with a brown powder inside it, and an ancient looking wooden plate chipped at the rim.

He looked at Tsano, his eyebrows raised. "The money?"

Tsano handed him the leather bag. The Nameless One unzipped it, satisfied himself that it contained what it should with a careless glance, zipped it closed again and placed it at his feet. His eyes had become expressionless.

He turned back to the briefcase. He laid the contents on the table top – the whisk, the plastic sachet and, lastly, the wooden bowl. He sprinkled the brown powder from the sachet into the wooden bowl and then instructed Tsano to pass urine into the wooden bowl. Tsano was beyond questioning. He unzipped his fly and pissed into the wooden bowl. The urine stank strongly of beer.

The Nameless One then took his whisk and immersed it in the urine. He stirred it, then turned towards the chair that held the cause of Tsano's woes. Using the whisk, he sprayed the concoction over the

skeletal hand. Mouthing soft incantations, he gently reached out and picked up the hand, his eyes reduced to mere slits. Tsano's heart slid sickeningly in his chest, and his eyes darted around the room in fright. The Nameless One walked towards the door that led to the backyard, singing a song in a strange tongue.

Tsano followed him outside. The Nameless One, now singing loudly in his strange tongue, placed the hand on the ground. He collected dry sticks and anything combustible around the yard. He then built a fire next to the hand. When the fire was burning well, he placed the hand on it. The flames instantly engulfed it and it burned to ashes.

The Nameless One collected the ash and put it in an envelope he took from his jacket pocket. They returned to the living room where he placed the envelope inside his briefcase.

"I am going to take the ash of the hand of darkness to a cemetery when the moon rises and spread it over the dead, where it rightfully belongs," he told Tsano. "The matter is now over, son of Khaya. Your house has been cleansed and strengthened so that those that hate you shall never be able to harm you again," he smiled at Tsano. "And your businesses are now going to give you much profit."

With these words, he packed his paraphernalia into his briefcase and, with a small wave and a serene smile that settled the butterflies fluttering in Tsano's heart, The Nameless One went out of Tsano's life, the briefcase in one hand and the leather bag in the other.

Tsano was the happiest man after the cleansing of his mansion. His mind felt clear, his heart clean, and his richly furnished house had resumed the peaceful aura that it had possessed when his wife was still alive. His businesses were prospering and, to cap it all, he received a note from his daughter informing him that she had passed her exams with flying colours and would be returning home in a few months time. This pleased Tsano so much that, in one rash moment, he gave all of his employees a slight salary increase. A few days later he fired a few workers to offset the increment. Those were Tsano's clear rules on economics; that is why he was a millionaire.

Tsano massaged his great belly underneath his white cotton vest and belched contentedly. He was sunk up to his ears in his favourite new chair, his eyes closed in blissful reverie. He picked up his glass of whisky from the low glass topped table in front of him and took a sip. It was his fifth glass that afternoon and he was feeling a bit woozy.

He glanced at his wristwatch: 4pm. He impatiently drummed his fingers on the arm of his seat. Zizi was late again. It was Sunday afternoon, on Sunday afternoons she always came at 3pm sharp. Maybe she wasn't coming after all. The bitch.

"MaTshuma!" Tsano cried out in a loud voice. A middle aged woman in a spotlessly clean uniform appeared from the kitchen.

"Braai a boerewors for me," Tsano ordered her.

She disappeared into the kitchen without a word.

There was a half eaten plate of congealed tripe on the table beside his whisky glass. With two fingers, Tsano pulled an intestine from the plate, looked at in disgust, then threw it back onto the plate. He shoved the plate to the other side of the table.

Zizi had been like this for the past two weeks. Not turning up for appointments and always making silly excuses – "Oh Tsano sweetie I had to attend a party at work for one of our staff who got promoted.... Oh Tsano darling I had to visit my mother, she is not feeling well ... Oh Tsano honey I had some friends over at my flat." On and on. But still not coming.

Come to think of it, ever since his house had been cleansed by The Nameless One, she had stopped coming over, despite his invitations and the presents he left for her at her work place. He raised his right buttock slightly and broke wind.

Maybe she was part of the bad luck that The Nameless One had cleansed from his house. Who knew?

When the maid brought the plate of braaied boerewors, Tsano was snoring drunkenly on his sofa, his mouth wide open like a beached whale. A tendril of saliva snaked from the corner of his mouth down to his hairy chest. The maid grimaced in disgust and left the room with the plate of boerewors.

Monday afternoon. Tsano lumbered into the cool interior of the

Department Store. From a distance, over the heads of the other shoppers, he could see Zizi's cosmetics counter. She was talking to a man. As Tsano watched, the man left the counter and headed for the sunlit entrance. Zizi surreptitiously looked around, picked up a magazine from the counter and headed for the exit that led to the ladies room. Tsano glanced sharply at the man who had left Zizi's counter. He had a slight body, a lean ferrety face, short deep black hair that looked dyed and was dressed in an expensive light grey summer suit. Tsano hurried after him out into the hot sun. As Tsano reached the parking lot, the man was opening the door of a maroon Pajero.

Suddenly, another man appeared, as if from nowhere, and accosted the first man. With a feeling of *déjà vu*, Tsano watched the two men talking by the door of the Pajero. The second man was The Nameless One. Tsano frowned. After speaking, The Nameless One, his face serene, left the other man, who looked perplexed, and walked away down the rows of parked cars.

Tsano hurried after The Nameless One, taking pains to make sure he was not observed. The Nameless One rounded a corner, pulled open the driver's door of a red BMW and slid behind the wheel. Tsano stood a safe distance away, unobserved. Through the BMW's side window, he saw The Nameless One produce a cell-phone and finger some digits on it. He brought it up to his ear, spoke briefly, then pocketed it again.

Minutes later, Zizi appeared and headed for the BMW. She pulled open the front passenger door and slid inside. There was a radiant smile on her face. The Nameless One smiled back and they kissed. The BMW pulled out of the parking lot. As it passed Tsano, he ducked down behind a parked car. A blast of loud Kwaito music hit him from the car's open window.

Tsano felt his stomach begin to loosen. Cold sweat ran down his face. He staggered to where he had parked his car. He slumped behind the steering wheel and just sat there, his face buried in his hands, his breathing shallow.

Bush Cucumber

Anne Simone Hutton

The way they hang, suspended like
ideas in the bushes, lanterns in flight,
candle angels, dangling mountaineers.
Safely harnessed and on hairy ropes.
They are springy yo-yos, yams of the air.
Orange condoms concentrating gold.
They drop, perspiring needles, swinging
sores. Try milk those tricky udders,
or the devil testicles of a bull!
Hanging like a horny dream above
baby beetles and innocent floors.
A pendant bomb, delicate as time,
its gourd weight mid-air.
Rhino-rattles, multicorn, cosmetically
unviable. Voluptuous with warts.
Their brushing grooms a porcupine.
From green they grow a fiery rash,
spread the spook of dermatitis, infect
the brittle beards of undergrowth.
Pine cone twins on a cuckoo clock.
Swiss toy cable-cars on pulleys,
converging in heaven, rocket jokes
in June. They soap my hands into
blisters, and hiss transferring thorns.
They'll stay for Christmas unless I suck
from their bladder seedy sour urine.
A fruit, for looks and reprisal; for
salads I'd slice a smoother form.

The Bar

Tawanda Chipato

The bar. A place to see and be seen. Bulawayo bars are something else. Even as you get to the door, invariably covered by a black cloth that has definitely seen better days, you are given a stern warning by the fat lady sitting outside, selling everything from chicken heads to amacimbi, that, yes, you are about to cross over from the world of the misguided teetotaller to that of the serious drunkard. A world totally divorced from the sober world outside. Once you step into this world there is no turning back. Only drunkenness, or a severe beating from a drunken counterpart, is enough to make you leave this world, albeit reluctantly. Once you enter this world, forget about paying the children's school fees. Forget about buying that TV that you have been promising yourself and your family, for this is a world where financial constraint is frowned upon. Normal reasoning is not tolerated here. Once that door is open and your eardrums are suddenly punished by the sounds of loud Kwaito music blaring from a thousand loudspeakers, you know there is no turning back. Once the mean-looking, muscle-bound, black-as-coal bouncer has finished a body search on you, that any seasoned police officer would be proud of, you know you are in.

This is a world where you thrive. As you saunter towards the main bar, you are greeted by a chorus of "How are you, friend?" from friend and foe alike. You ignore them all, for you have one mission and there will be no talk until that vital mission has been accomplished. At the bar you nonchalantly flick the barman a couple of \$500 notes and say the words you've been dying to say since leaving home – "One Castle, please" – with a sigh of relief. The barman looks at you, at the clothes you are wearing, how expensive your watch is, whether or not you have a cell-phone, trying to gauge your potential for buying beer. If he deems you worthy, a very wide plastic smile is on offer, accompanied by a very cold beer. If he finds you lacking in any way or form, a cool "uthini, my bro", will suffice.

After taking one long swig of the sweet nectar, you know that

mission number one has been accomplished to the satisfaction of both body and soul. You then arrogantly turn around and survey this new world. This is a kingdom where anyone and everyone can be king, at least for a day. In this world, your value is not determined by the number of oil wells, gold mines or diamond mines that you own. It is determined by the number of pints you buy for your friends and acquaintances. “That guy, he buys a lot of beer” is the usual refrain among the perpetually broke, as the king for that particular day walks in. In this world, your might is not determined by the number of nukes you have hidden under your bed in your grand old palace, or by how large your army of gullible and blindly loyal young men is. Your might is determined by how many beers you can drink before falling on your face. “That guy is strong, he can finish a whole crate on his own” are the words of awe and reverence spoken whenever the undisputed king of the drinkers walks in. Yes siree, this is another world and you are really glad to be part of it.

A quick survey having pinpointed no one you know, you walk over to the nearest person sitting on his own. “How are you, my friend?” you say as you take the seat beside him uninvited. A quick glance from head to toe from your newly acquired friend takes in everything. The cell phone hanging like a black brick at your hip, the black jeans which now have a brownish tinge from having been washed too often, the fake Adidas tackies, aptly renamed Adibas. If he thinks you won’t buy him his next beer, he discourages you by pretending to be too drunk to talk. If he thinks you will, the conversation flows freely. “Is the beer nice?” is the age-old question asked by drunkards since the Stone Age. “The beer is just too nice” is the answer given back, as predictably as the sunrise.

Satisfied that you now have a close friend and ally, in this place where one-night friendships are the norm, you carry out a more detailed survey of this confusing world. A kaleidoscope of characters awaits your eyes, each with a different reason for having made an entrance into this world. The dreadlocked guy and unofficial drug lord of this kingdom stands by the door and tells everyone as they enter “I have some very good marijuana”. At the slightest indication of interest, Mr Dreadlocks goes into his sales pitch, animatedly telling

the would-be customer how good his product is, where he got it from (invariably Malawi) and how high it will get him. Occasionally Mr Dreadlocks leaves the bar with a red-eyed customer and they come back ten or so minutes later giggling together like two silly schoolgirls.

Then there is the suave urban conman, who doesn't seem able to sit down. He is constantly on the move, from one end of the bar to the other, in his ill-fitting suit, proudly proclaiming to all and sundry that "I have money today", the desperate look in his eyes saying otherwise. The length of time he spends sipping one beer says it all. When he finally finishes that one beer, he angrily bangs the empty bottle on the bar counter and shouts "The beer in this bar is hot, I'm changing bars" and heads hastily for the exit. This little drama is greeted by hoots of laughter from everyone in the bar, including you. You tell your now close friend that "If only he had asked for a beer, I'd have bought him one". Your newly acquired best friend and confidant, conscious of the fact that you have just bought him a beer, nods his head vigorously in agreement. "These young men are a problem," says your best friend, conveniently forgetting that he is being a big drain on your fast dwindling financial resources. You nod your head and take another mighty swig of the befuddling waters.

The pot-bellied forty-something, surrounded by girls young enough to be his daughters, catches your eye. He is buying beer as if the Almighty himself has officially declared tomorrow non-existent. The girls laugh at everything he says, but their combined laughter has an air of competition about it. They all know that, when everything has been said and done, only one of them will be going home with him tonight. The younger, less affluent, patrons of the bar are fully aware of this. They bide their time and, when that time comes, they will pounce. The older, more seasoned whores, look on with envy. They remember their heyday, when they could get any man they wanted, just by clicking their fingers. One old whore in particular, wearing a dress that reveals as much as it is desperately trying to conceal, is doing her best to attract Mr Potbelly's attention. She walks past him countless times, provocatively swinging her enormous backside, but Mr Potbelly does not notice. Tonight he has fresh meat

on his mind, not biltong. You point this out to your now bothersome not-quite-a-best-friend and you both laugh at this spectacle.

A group of teenagers noisily stagger into the bar, wearing all the latest fashions from America, and you dismissively tell your friend “amaSalad”. Your friend readily agrees and, looking at you with pleading eyes, almost desperately says “Can I have one beer, my friend, I’m now broke”. You wearily get out of your seat and reluctantly make your way to the bar to get the beer. The barman is all smiles and niceness now, and so is your friend when you give him his beer. You then realize that Mr Potbelly has been deserted by his bevy of beauties, who are now being fondled familiarly by the group of teenagers. One of these begins puking opaque beer onto the carpet, much to the embarrassment of his drinking buddies, and he is soon ejected from the bar, somewhat roughly, by the hefty bouncer. Mr Potbelly has since found comfort in the arms of the whore with the big buttocks and the skimpy dress. Such is life, you think, as you stagger to the bar to buy another much needed beer. As you take out the money, you realize that the hefty bundle of \$500 dollar notes has dwindled to almost nothing. When you go back to your seat, your now drunk friend looks at you with incredulous eyes. “Where is my beer?” he says in a thoroughly shocked voice. “I don’t have any more money, this is my last beer,” you say as you drunkenly take a seat. Your friend gets up in disgust and miraculously meanders his way out of the bar. You follow him half an hour later and somehow find your way home.

The next day, you don’t remember anything at all from the previous night. The headache that threatens to split your head in two is reminder enough that it was a heavy night. You overzealously promise yourself that you will never go back to the bar again, but you know that it’s just the hangover talking. You know that when the bar starts calling, you will listen and you will obey.

The Queue

Bryony Rheam

From her window, Mrs Atkinson looked out across the garden. The yellowing rag of a lawn stretched down to the washing line, and beyond that lay the vegetable garden. This itself was little more than a blur on her horizon, short sighted as she was. It was hot. The air was dry with the fierce heat of summer. A film of sweat lay cool across her skin. She ran her tongue absently along her top lip, tasting the saltiness with exhaustion.

It was half past two on a Saturday afternoon, too hot still to go outside. A quietness has descended and stilled the house. Perhaps it was stupid to think it quieter than any other day? She lived alone – why should today be any different to any other day of the week? Yet there did seem to be a different feeling about Saturday afternoons; it was as though the whole world was quiet.

She turned the tap on and let the water run into a plastic bucket. It would be foolish to waste water at this time of year; the rainy season was never guaranteed. The water in the bucket could be used later. When the water ran colder, she filled a glass and raised it to her lips. Until then she hadn't realised how thirsty she was. She held the tap in one hand and continued to drink, all the time looking out of the window at the heat shimmering just above the lawn. She almost wanted to pour the water onto it, and put out the white flames before they ate their way through more of the garden, their fingers drawing every drop of moisture from the earth.

There was a knock at the back door; it was Robinson, the gardener. He stood alongside his bicycle; it had once belonged to her son, Barry. Rose had given it to him the Christmas before last. He had been over the moon at the sight of it and had painted it shiny black and replaced the handlebars with those from a racing bike. He was smart in a light blue suit and white shirt. Rose felt hot just looking at him. His two-tone brogues were polished to a brilliant gleam and a ring on his right hand glinted brightly when it caught the sun. He had on a pair of sunglasses and a light blue hat that matched his suit.

Robinson shifted the bike slightly and grinned apologetically at her. She knew what he wanted. It was the look he gave her when he wanted to borrow money.

“Yes, Robinson,” she said, waiting for the expected question, sipping the water patiently.

“Madam,” began Robinson, his grin expanding rapidly, “please, I need to borrow some money for the weekend.”

Rose breathed deeply in and out. The silence of the afternoon seemed to breathe with her.

“What is it for this time?” she asked, although she didn’t know why she bothered; she lent him the money no matter how strange or convoluted the reason was. Jack had criticised her for being too soft, but there was always a smile playing somewhere on his lips and sometimes he would ruffle her hair in a fatherly manner and kiss the top of her head. Jack. It all seemed such a long time ago.

“My brother has come from Kezi. He was promised a job down there” - here he pointed with his left hand towards the gate - “in Riverside, but then the man said to him no job, so now he must go back to Kezi.”

Rose suddenly felt irritated. Was there a brother?

“You really must try and save your money,” she said crossly. “I cannot afford to keep giving you loans all the time. I need money too.”

Robinson grinned, embarrassed yet certain he had won his way. Rose walked over to the kitchen table and took her purse from her bag which was hanging over the back of a chair. She took out two hundred and fifty dollars and looked at it for a second. Putting the fifty back in her purse, she walked back to the door and handed him the two purple blue notes. He had taken off his glasses and his eyes flickered over the money. He stood holding them, peeling one back as if to check there weren’t more there. Immediately she knew it was not enough.

“Ah, madam,” he said with an apologetic laugh, “it is now very expensive to go that side.”

Rose felt her body stiffen a little with irritation. How much more could it be? How much did she give him last Christmas to get home?

“How much is it now?” she asked. She could feel the heat from

outside forcing its way in. She wanted him to go so that she could close the door and be alone in the relative coolness of the house.

“One thousand,” he said. Another laugh, another smile.

“One thousand!” she repeated, unbelievably.

“Yes, it is one thousand now to go,” he replied.

Rose closed her eyes briefly, took a deep breath and went back to fetch her purse. She counted out eight hundred dollars.

“That doesn’t leave me a lot,” she said, “so I must have this money back soon soon.”

“Yes, madam, I will bring it,” he said.

“Monday,” she said. “I want it back Monday morning. First thing.”

“Yes, madam, I will bring it Monday,” he said.

He put the money she had just given him in the inside pocket of his jacket. Rose sighed and shook her head as she watched him cycle out of the gate. He started to whistle.

Rose wandered out into the garden. The earth was hard and dry. It had begun to crack in places, and looked as though it would fall apart if she walked on it and she would disappear into a great cavernous hole beneath. Even the rough, dry grass seemed to cling precariously to it; much of it was dead already. She could feel the heat on the back of her head and half turned to go in and fetch her hat when her eye caught sight of something strangely out of character with the rest of the garden.

Behind the washing line was the vegetable patch, but it had lain barren for months. Nothing seemed to grow and there wasn’t enough water to keep anything alive. Next to the back fence, however, in a straight row, was a line of mealie plants. Rose stared at them in disbelief. The sturdy plants had pushed themselves triumphantly out of the earth and stood, as though ready for inspection, before her. The earth around them was dark and solid. It was not parched or cracked; it was warm, healthy earth that had been tilled and fed and looked after. A slight breeze jostled the mealies together, and their papery green arms lifted in a half wave. She could hardly see the white cobs, swaddled as they were in layers of thin green sheets. What looked like silvery flaxen hair tumbled down outside.

Rose looked at the scene in front of her in disbelief. So this was why he was always in the back garden when she called him. This was why the front garden looked unkempt and why weeds grew prolifically in the flowerbeds. She had noticed the deteriorating state of the garden, but had thought it due to the late start to the rainy season and the poor soil in that area. She had meant to buy compost and fertilizer, but the actual act had constantly seemed to elude her. It was always on her shopping list, but somehow she always drove past the nursery and the garden centre without stopping. Something always made her drive on, and the items were added to the bottom of the next shopping list. If she was honest with herself, she would admit that she didn't see the point of caring any more what the garden looked like. How much longer would she be around? Isn't that what she thought every time she passed the nursery? Of course a good garden would add value to the house should Barry want to sell it, and he probably would. She doubted he would ever come back to Zimbabwe; there was no point, no future here for a young man and his family.

How different it was when she was his age! She remembered telling her mother they were going to Rhodesia. Jack had a job there, a good job, and the country was welcoming people. He told her of the lifestyle, the big houses and the gardens they had there, the servants, the weather. And now not one of those things would tempt Barry to come back. Her mother said she was a fool, and perhaps she was, but then she was young, and in love. Rose half smiled at the memory. Perhaps her mother had been right after all. You're wrong to marry an older man, she had said and shaken her head knowingly. You're making a big mistake. There's twenty years between you and him. What are you going to do when he is an old man and you still want to go places and do things? But we love each other, she had protested. Wasn't that the most important thing? Everything else should fall into place around that.

But perhaps her mother hadn't been thinking about whether they'd still be able to play tennis together in twenty years time, or have the same friends and interests. Maybe she was talking about now, this time; retirement. Old age is so far away when you are young.

Rose suddenly felt an urge to rip out the mealies, cut them down

with her bare hands and crush them into the earth. Her anger, however, was not directed at Robinson so much as the memory of her mother, sitting stiff lipped through her wedding ceremony and resignedly kissing her afterwards; a dry, papery, unforgiving kiss. Resisting the urge to destroy Robinson's work, Rose turned abruptly and went into the garage. Here she searched through an array of gardening tools, many broken and rusty, for a small trowel and a rake. She would show him, she thought, she would show him who could and who could not grow flowers. Marching over to the flowerbeds in the front garden, she knelt down and furiously dug at the weeds. Over and over she tugged and pulled and lunged. A pile of weeds grew next to her, their long thin white roots exposed to the sky and the sun.

Although there wasn't a lot left in the beds after the weeds had been uprooted, Rose felt a deep sense of satisfaction. She turned on the tap and held the hose above the smattering of daisies and violets. There was even a rose bush she had never noticed, spindly and flowerless and dying. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Except you, Rose, my Rose, Jack always used to say. Oh Jack, where are you now?

That evening, Rose decided she would see to the garden herself. Robinson could do all the watering and look after the back garden, which he would prefer anyway, and she would tend to the flowerbeds. She would go to the garden centre on Monday, buy a range of seedlings and perhaps a couple of potted plants – and what about a hanging basket, those were so beautiful – and she would spend the next couple of days digging and planting and watering.

She couldn't wait. The next day she prepared the beds. Not content with her work of the day before, she turned the soil over with the trowel and picked the dry leaves off what plants there were. Then she moved onto the next flowerbed and did the same. And the next. It was hard work. The sun was hot and she had to go back into the house for her large straw hat, but she could still feel the sun through her shirt, warm at first but growing more threatening and insistent. It didn't want her there; she was supposed to be hiding in the house like she always did, sad and alone, not out here actually enjoying herself. The sun resented her presence and despised her defiance; it would do

anything to drive her away and so pressed itself harder against her, driving its spiteful fingers deeper.

Yet she did not give up. All day she worked until the beds were ready and the soil lay cool and dark and inviting and a pile of dead leaves and weeds had collected beside her. Then she went indoors and washed her hands. She stood at the kitchen sink and scrubbed her nails with a small brush. It was then she thought - I need the money. I need the money I lent Robinson. He wasn't back yet. She would wait until after she'd had something to eat for supper and then go and see if he was in. With an air of accomplishment, she started to prepare the meal. She took two eggs out of the fridge and set them down on the counter. Normally she would just boil them and have them with a slice of bread and butter and perhaps a piece of cheese. It was so expensive now that she only allowed herself a small slice, however hungry she was. But then she was never hungry, not these days. She had watched herself getting thinner and thinner over the past year. Her pension didn't go far these days. Don't worry, Jack had said, I've a great pension. We'll even be able to travel. Perhaps even go to Europe every couple of years. Europe! When had she last been there? Rose thought for a moment. She had gone to France as a child with her father. She remembered sitting with him in a café in Nice. It was a brief memory; she remembered him reading the paper and her looking out of the window at the people walking by. It was raining and they had eaten hard dry bread and drunk coffee while they waited for it to pass. Ever since then the smell of coffee made her think of rain.

They had never gone to Europe, she and Jack. They hadn't gone anywhere after he retired, except Nyanga once at the start of Jack's illness. After that he had rapidly gotten worse and then ... well, what was the point of going on holiday on one's own? Her cousin Penelope did though. She sometimes got a postcard from her, normally from some Mediterranean country or other, and once one from Australia. She went on those Saga holidays, especially designed for people over fifty. Rose had laughed at first. Was fifty the cut-off point then? No mountain climbing or deep sea diving! Penelope would never come and see her though, although she had promised to many times. She had once suggested that Rose and her meet in Cairo and tour the

Middle East together. *You're already in Africa*, she had written, *it would save you flying all the way here if we could meet in Cairo. My neighbour, Sandra, went last year and she highly recommends the tour. It may sound expensive, but it does include all coach and air transfers and all the accommodation in Egypt and Israel.* Rose smiled ruefully at the memory of her cousin's letter. How could she tell her that Jack's pension barely paid the bills, never mind covering an eight-day tour of the Middle East? Penelope had always envied Rose for moving away, had always thought she and Jack lived some luxurious life in Africa. She thought Rose turning down the offer to join her in Cairo a sign of fear, the fear of being on one's own after years of being pampered and looked after by a generous and adoring, but much older, husband. *You HAVE to come here!* She had written from Australia, where she had managed to see Barry. They had written a joint postcard, Penelope's scrawl filling most of it and Barry adding a line of: *Hope to see you soon!* Although he knew jolly well she could never afford the trip.

Why doesn't he pay for you to go over? Someone had once asked her. Oh he's got his own life now, she had laughed in reply, I don't want to be a burden. Still, she had seen the accusing look in their eyes, the eyes of all the pensioners left behind. Children in England, in America and Australia. New Zealand, Canada, South Africa. Children brought up on sunshine and space and maids and a good education. Where were they now? They had thrown the country back in their parents' faces and run. I gave him the world, Rose once thought of Barry, and he had given it back in a smaller box, instead.

Rose made an omelette, a cheese omelette with a small side salad. She wished she had something to drink, a glass of wine perhaps, or a gin and tonic. Instead she poured herself a glass of water from a bottle in the fridge; she had long ago stopped buying fruit juices and, long before that, alcohol. But today was celebration enough. Her roughened hands could not have given her more joy to look at if they had held a glass of champagne, and the meal itself, the extra time she had spent making it, awakened in her a sense of life she hadn't felt for years.

That night she could hardly sleep. She woke twice, once just before dawn with a child-like feeling of excitement. Something was

going to happen that day, something special. It was like Christmas, except that Christmas hadn't felt like this for a long time. Not since Barry had grown up, and really even before then when she had been a child. For the first time in a while, Rose deliberated over what to wear. Usually her wardrobe varied between two pairs of trousers and two blouses. Today, she pushed these well worn garments along the rail and looked at what else she had. She looked right at the back of the cupboard where her evening dresses hung in plastic covers. She lifted one out and ran her hand along the fabric. Although it smelt a little stale, it was clean and soft and it hadn't faded at all. Rose smiled and pulled the dress a little closer to her. When had she last worn it? Years and years and years ago, yet when she held it she could remember all the feelings, as though it were just yesterday.

She used to have her wedding dress too, but had eventually given it away. She wondered if anyone still had it, or whether it had been thrown away or cut up and used for something else. She hadn't wanted to part with it, but what was the point really of keeping it? She had had no daughters, no one to give it to. When Barry got married to Anneline, she had thought briefly of giving the dress to her daughter-in-law, but had thought the style might be considered old-fashioned, and so had refrained from offering it, not wanting to embarrass the young girl who might have felt obliged to wear it.

She was a nice young girl, well, woman now, Anneline, thought Rose as she searched through her wardrobe for something suitable to wear. She had gone to stay with them in Cape Town about a year before they left for Australia. She hadn't known then of their plans and they didn't tell her. Rose stopped suddenly and looked up. What had they said? They had been talking in the kitchen in lowered voices and she had walked in. What had they been speaking about to make them start like that when they noticed her presence? Rose shook her head and carried on with her search. She eventually decided on a navy blue skirt and a white blouse with a very thin navy line running through it. Jack loved her to wear navy; she hadn't wanted to wear it since his illness got so advanced he couldn't recognise her.

She sat at the dressing table and brushed her hair. Perhaps she should go for a cut, she thought. When had she last allowed herself

that privilege? She looked at herself for a long time and then smiled. She was old, but she didn't look *too* bad. Thank god she had always worn a hat in the sun. Rummaging through a drawer, she found a pot of unused cream and some foundation. Anneline had given her the cream on her last visit. 'To cheer you up', she had said, but Rose hadn't used it. Slowly, she now rubbed it into her face and then smoothed a layer of foundation over it. She could still smell a faint perfume, even though it must have lain in the drawer for a good few years. How lovely it felt! How it awakened her and made her fingers tingle, like they had the day before when she had submerged them in earth and felt life, at first far away and then nearer, begin to beat again.

She was ready at last. She took another look at herself in the mirror and smiled. She straightened her posture and turned to look at herself from the side. Suddenly, she felt nervous. She hadn't dressed this way for ages. What if she bumped into someone she knew in town, something she invariably did? What would they think? That she had met someone new? That she had come into money? She sat on the edge of the bed and looked at her hands; she was sweating. For a moment her new found confidence left her and she felt it was all a mistake. She would take these silly clothes off and change into her usual trousers and blouse, and she would take this silly make-up off too.

It was the sudden vision of her old self, the downtrodden old woman, living out her last days in some sort of social and economic strait-jacket, that made Rose change her mind yet again, and actually defy herself. She picked up her handbag and her car keys and, with a certain spring in her step, made her way to the kitchen. She opened the back door and called for Robinson. There was no reply. She called again, and still there was no reply. He hadn't come home the night before and he probably wasn't going to be at work that day. Rose's heart sank. Suddenly more than ever, she wanted to go into town. She looked in her bag. She had enough money to get some basic groceries and post a letter to Australia. She could always draw some money from the POSB while she was at the post office. She didn't do it often and, anyway, this was some sort of occasion. A memory of Christmas

as a child briefly washed over Rose again. It was a feeling she wanted to hold on to and take with her, but it was gone. There was no reason why she should be so happy, except that she was alive and she had been dead for so long.

She started her car; it was nearly on empty. She would have to join a petrol queue on the way home. Normally she would have sighed and inwardly lamented the fact, feeling the realization fall like a large stone into the well of sadness inside her. Today the fact that she had little petrol was a challenge: how far could she go? Rose giggled; this was called living on the edge in Zimbabwe. She reversed the Morris out of the gate rather more quickly than she was used to and felt her heart flutter in excitement.

All the way to town, she saw lines and lines of cars parked alongside the road. Many were left empty while their owners went to work. Some were parked at crooked angles, having obviously pushed their way into the queues. In places there were two or three lines of cars and, at one garage, a queue formed from both ends of the forecourt, causing chaos. A minibus full of commuters suddenly pulled out from the side of the road; it hadn't been in the queue but picking people up from a bus stop. Rose swerved into the next lane and a silver Land Cruiser shot by, its hooter screaming loudly at her. Rose clutched her chest and slammed on the brakes. The car behind her hooted as well and overtook, the driver leaning over and shouting at her. Fumbling at the gear stick, Rose slowly drove forward. Her heart was pounding and her palms were sweating.

She caught a glance at herself in the rear view mirror and was surprised at what she saw. Although she felt pale and frightened, her cheeks were still pink with rouge and her mouth red with lipstick. It made her feel better and she took a few deep breaths. She promised herself a cup of tea when she got to town.

She parked her car in the shade and decided she would try and walk as much as possible to conserve fuel. Perhaps she wouldn't bother getting any that day. There didn't look as though there was a lot about and she didn't want to wait in the sun for petrol that might not come.

Feeling rather important, she walked into the little café near the

supermarket. She would have something to drink first and then go and do her grocery shopping. The café had changed hands many times since she had known it. For a long time it had been called Gregory's, after Tom Gregory, an Italian who had changed his name during the war in an effort to appear more 'English'. It was called Gregory's long after the old man had died in the late seventies, but it lost its feel, its certain something that made it special. Gradually it declined and became more of a take-away than anything else and the name changed to Mr Tasty's, or was it Mr Yummy's, Rose couldn't remember. She hadn't gone there anyway. Then about five years ago, a young couple took it over and reopened it as a coffee shop once again. It was called Roseanne's, and had pretty floral tablecloths and chair backs, and the menus were printed nicely and there was a cappuccino machine and air conditioning in the hot summer months.

Rose hadn't been there for a long time, two or three years, and she noticed that there was now a carpet and they had repainted the walls; this time a light green. The waiter approached her with a menu but she shook her head and smiled.

"Don't worry, I know what I'm having. A cup of tea, please."

The waiter laughed good-naturedly. "Anything else?" His pen was poised above his notebook as he spoke.

"Nothing else," said Rose, firmly. "Just a nice big cup of tea."

"O.K." said the waiter, putting his notebook away and removing some cutlery from the table. He polished a side plate with his cloth, looked up as two more customers walked in and went to show them to a table.

While Rose waited for the waiter to return, she got out her notebook and made a list of things she would need to buy in the supermarket. She wanted to be organized; she wanted everything to go well. She wrote: eggs, milk, vegetables. Then she stopped, thought for a few seconds and added: yoghurt. She needed a treat. She also wrote sausages and instant pudding. She would spoil herself today.

The waiter returned a few minutes later with a teacup and saucer and a jug of milk. The cup was filled with hot water and a tea bag floated inside. Rose looked disapprovingly at it.

"Don't you give teapots these days?"

“You said you wanted a cup,” replied the waiter.

“Yes, I want a cup of tea, but usually you give a pot, not a cup.”

The waiter opened the menu and pointed to the section under ‘Beverages’.

“You see, it says one cup here and one pot here.”

Rose looked. “Is that the price?” she gasped. “For one cup of tea?”

“Yes, madam, for one cup of tea, that is the price.”

Rose looked away. Her eyes were brimming with tears. How could she pay for the groceries now? Again, she tried to calm herself. She could always go to the POSB if she needed more money. She had decided on that before she left the house. Robinson still owed her money and she wouldn’t have to come in again until next week. She tried to enjoy the tea and sipped it slowly, but really she just wanted to get out of the café and away from everyone.

She looked over at the table next to her. A young family was ordering coffee and cakes from the waiter. At another table, a man was eating breakfast. How much did all this cost? Where did they get the money?

Just as she was paying for her tea at the till, Rose felt a hand on her arm and a voice said: “Rose! It is you! I was just walking past and I thought to myself I’m sure that’s Rose Atkinson, and it is! How wonderful to see you! How are you?”

It was Mabel Baker. Mabel and she had played tennis for years together. Mabel still looked as though she played.

“Mabel,” said Rose. “How are you? Keeping well? That’s good.”

“How are you?” asked Mabel again.

Rose nodded her head in response. “Oh fine, fine, you know.”

There was a pause and then “You look really good, Rose. I’m so glad.”

Rose managed a half smile, but she was thinking, she’s surprised, surprised I look well, I expect she thought I was dead a long time ago.

Mabel squeezed her arm “It’s a pity you’re on your way out. We could have caught up over a cup of tea. And they do the most wonderful scones here.” Here she nodded over at the cashier who smiled. Rose could tell she was a regular. The invitation still hung on the air as Rose shook her head and said she must be getting on, she

had so much to do. Mabel nodded her head and gave her an odd smile, as though she knew Rose didn't want to talk.

In an effort to appear as composed and as focused as possible, Rose went straight into the supermarket and picked up a basket. She had promised herself a leisurely wander of the shelves, something she used to enjoy doing, but now she put what she wanted into her basket and made her way to the till. The man in front of her was paying by cheque and she had to wait while the supervisor was called to approve it. Waves of heat swept over Rose and she shifted the basket from one hand to the other. She decided to take the things out and put them on the counter while she waited. It was only then that she remembered she hadn't gone to the post office. She tried to put the things back in the basket but the cashier had just started ringing her goods up on the till.

"Wait. Please," said Rose. The man stopped.

"I haven't got enough money."

The man stared.

"I forgot ... I was supposed to go to the post office... Oh dear, I am sorry."

The supervisor was called again. The story was explained. Rose apologised once more. Something was punched into the till and there was a whirring and a clicking and the receipt was torn off and signed and counter-signed. Her goods were placed to one side and Rose promised to be back in five minutes.

She hurriedly left the store and made a beeline for the post office. There was a queue. A notice written on what looked like the back of an advertisement for first day covers, and in writing which began in large capitals and ended in small squashed letters, announced that one of the counters was closed. Rose waited. The heat washed over her again. This time the waves seemed larger, more threatening and insistent, determined to bring her down with them. The queue was moving slowly; people were withdrawing a lot of money and it wasn't even Christmas. Christmas. Did anyone still do that anymore? She remembered the card she had to send to Barry. Why did she keep it up, she suddenly thought? He never wrote, not even a card. Anneline always wrote it; she even signed it for him. Lots of love, Barry and

Anneline. Anneline and Barry. What was it all about, anyway? All this loving, all this giving. Rose's head was spinning. She was hot, she was tired, she was flustered. All she wanted to do was sleep. She tried to calm herself. She was only two places from the counter. It wouldn't take long.

A man entered the post office. He was wearing torn blue overalls and broken shoes, and in his hand he carried his post office book. He walked up to the lady in front of her and said something to her. The woman stood back and let him go in front of her. Rose felt anger boiling up inside of her. She took two steps forward and pulled the man's arm roughly.

"What are you doing?" He looked at her.

"I said, what are you doing?"

People were beginning to stare. The man turned back and faced the front. Rose pulled his arm again.

"Get to the back of the queue!"

He didn't move.

"I said, get to the back of the queue!" Her voice was strained to a high pitch.

"Get back! Get back!" she screeched. Everyone was looking. "This is a queue, get back!"

The man didn't move so Rose turned on the man at the counter.

"Tell him to get in the queue!"

The man started to say something, but Rose could see he wasn't taking her side.

"The queue! The queue! Get to the back of the queue!"

Her heart was beating fast now and her palms were wet with sweat, but at the same time she was experiencing a feeling of letting go, of not caring. It was as if it were her privilege to scream and shout, as though she had been waiting for this moment all her life. The world started to spin and she felt slightly sick. It spun faster and faster and all she could hear was her voice on and on and on, "the queue, go to the back of the queue!" She felt a pain somewhere, far away. Barry, she thought, and then, Jack. Darling Jack, where are you? She tried to steady herself and put out her hand. It was Anneline. What was she doing here? Rose, she was saying, you mustn't creep up on us like

that. You gave us such a fright. And there was Barry. He was smiling, but he looked worried, harassed. What had they been saying, just as she walked in? Something about Australia. Don't tell Mum, he said, it'll break her heart. What will, Barry, what will break my heart? But they had gone and there was only blue and then black and then nothing.

"I know her. Her name is Rose Atkinson. Atkinson, yes, A T... A ... A for apple." Mabel Baker paused while the policeman took down details. Someone put an arm round her shoulder as she wiped a tear away.

"How do you know the deceased?"

"Rose?" Of course he meant Rose, but somehow Mabel couldn't think of her as dead.

"We were good friends Rose and I. For years. We used to play tennis together." She waved an imaginary tennis racquet lethargically in front of the policeman.

"And the next of kin, who are they?"

Mabel thought. "Well, she's got a son, Barry. He's in Australia. Married. No children. Can't have any."

The policeman nodded sympathetically

"And there's her husband. Jack. He's in a home, you know. Must be about ninety now. Alzheimer's." She touched her head as though that would explain everything. "Poor old Rose. Not much of a life. That's where all her money went. Keeping him alive. Poor old Rose. And she looked so happy this morning."

Rain in Winter

John Eppel

I watch you watching the winter rain
of gold-tipped jacaranda leaves.
You wonder: will they clog the drain,
block the conduit pipe again?
Picking leaf-drops from my sleeves.

Your face is turned aslant from mine,
I cannot read your moving lips
but trace the enigmatic line
that demarcates your features fine
with my mind's fingertips.

You will not, now, return my stare,
(too late, too late, the barbet cries)
flicking leaflets from my hair,
each flick a gesture of despair.
The rain of winter in my eyes.

The Witch

Farai Mpofu

“She is the witch!” he whispered with a hoarse voice. An eerie silence swallowed the whole village as he picked up a huge round stone and aimed it at her head. An evil power seemed to grip the whole village and everyone attacked her. In the midst of the frenzy no one noticed the sweat that was trickling from the chief’s bald head. No one, in that orgy of violence, noticed the chief’s nervous smile and relieved eyes. Two days later, at the district hospital, the doctor’s post-mortem noted that she had a fractured skull, three broken ribs, a dislocated arm and a brain haemorrhage.

Two weeks before, the feelings of the inhabitants of village five in the Inyanda resettlement area oscillated between an outward excitement and an inward apprehension. The chief had initially resisted the intervention of Tsikamtande, a prophet and faith healer, but, after a few days away in the city, he had returned with an enthusiasm for the prophet’s visit. Tsikamtande would arrive in a fortnight. Tsikamtande’s fame had blazed through the drought stricken countryside like an angry veldt fire. Among his exploits, rumours said, he had healed many and caught those involved in such clandestine activities as infidelity, theft, murder and witchcraft. The chief declared that every household must ‘donate’ ten thousand dollars as a gift for Tsikamtande’s services. Everyone faithfully paid their dues. Some sold their skeletal cattle and goats to the local butchery. Some wrote telegrams to their relatives in the city demanding money. A certain miserly geriatric bachelor had to unearth all his life savings from his humble bank, which, they say, was an old baked beans tin buried in a secret location in the bush. Even the village beggars were not spared and had to beg the money from unscrupulous moneylenders. Everyone cooperated and paid punctually, except a certain widow called MaKhumalo.

MaKhumalo lived on the fringes of village five. The rumourmongers claimed that she had killed her husband, who had worked in the city of Bulawayo, after she discovered that he was a

womaniser. They said that she bewitched him and he became as thin as a thorn twig and coughed like a steam engine before he died. They also claimed that she had killed all her children and eaten them, as none of her children reached the age of six without dying from a mysterious disease. MaKhumalo was reduced to a woman who scavenged for fish and lived alone in a grotesque shelter, on the banks of the now dry Mpilo River. It did not surprise anyone that MaKhumalo had decided to play the renegade part as usual, when she adamantly refused to pay Tsikamtande's gift. No one argued with her when she, in her black mourning dress and doek, protested that she did not have money to pay Tsikamtande. The villagers did not waste their precious time listening to her stories as they had more pressing issues tormenting their minds.

Many unsettling things were happening in the village. Mysterious deaths accompanied the ravaging drought. The latest was that of the chief's last-born daughter. She had complained of a headache and died a few hours later. Her head had instantly turned into a lump of huge worms. At her funeral, a spirit possessed a young man from the village and warned the mourners that the chief was the source of all the rot. Everyone, except the eccentric MaKhumalo, dismissed it as a mischievous evil spirit. The next morning, the daughter's grave was found desecrated and her body had disappeared.

Many other disturbing events had happened, but one particular incident shocked village five and its neighbouring villages. Dube, a man of great esteem, had eloped to South Africa with his blood daughter Nestai after she fell pregnant to his seed. The wife, realizing what had happened, disappeared into the bush. Her decomposing body was found, half eaten by hyenas, two weeks later. A used packet of malaria tablets was found next to it.

Hence the planned appearance of Tsikamtande in the countryside was more than welcome to the inhabitants of village five, in the Inyanda resettlement area. Who was going to waste their time listening to the stories of a widow, who had killed her husband and three children? Who would waste their time?

No one will ever forget the day that Tsikamtande came. Every industrious activity in the village was brought to a halt. The women

took time off to gossip at the village borehole, while the men seriously ruminated on the proceedings of the day. The children played innocently in the barren maize fields, unaware of the graveness of the situation. For the young lovers, the day was a perfect opportunity for them to meet at some secret rendezvous and bring to reality their long planned fantasies. Only the bony figure of maKhumalo glided busily along the dry sands of the Mpilo River. She was always looking for dead fish to sell at the business centre. Suddenly there was a deafening rhythmic beat of drums at the chief's compound which drew all the villagers. Tsikamtande had finally arrived.

Everyone recognised him at first sight. He wore an oversized white gown with a conspicuous red cross on his abdomen. His assistant was carrying a curious looking monkey-skin bag. Tsikamtande started rolling his eyes like a zombie and danced ecstatically to the rhythm of the drum played by his assistant. Anxiety and fear pervaded the compound and Tsikamtande's strange rumblings and chants heightened the tension. No one seemed to notice his shifty urban eyes. No one noticed the furtive glances the chief gave Tsikamtande. Suddenly the drumbeat stopped and Tsikamtande took a used marmalade jar from his assistant's bag. It contained a suspicious yellowish substance which looked like the faeces of a cholera-inflicted child. He took the substance, mixed it with some soil and threw it into the air. Suddenly the drumbeat started again and he began his dance. There was another exchange of conspiratorial glances and Tsikamtande whispered with a mamba-like voice, "She is the witch!"

MaKhumalo was beaten until she was reduced to a mere stain on those savannah sands. The villagers, fearing the consequences of their actions, fled to their homesteads. Tsikamtande quickly demanded his money from the chief and headed for the next district. The chief hid in his hut, while his family disappeared into the mountains. By nightfall, a mass of ugly grey clouds was looming over the village. The dogs howled mournfully throughout the night as heavy drops of rain crashed into the dusty ground. It rained until the Mpilo River burst its banks, carrying maKhumalo's humble hut with it. All night long she lay in the torrential rain. Despite the downpour, a deathly silence

pervaded the chief's compound. In the morning light, the villagers saw her body washed clean by the rain; they say her face looked like that of an innocent child.

The Erl-king

Deon Marcus

“...in seinen Armen das Kind war todt.”

What ever happened to those Sunday
afternoons when time for a moment stood
quite still, when poetry was read with tea and
scones and Schubert lieder filled the air with their

spinning wheels and Erl-king tales?
What ever happened to walks at Hillside
Dams and sitting sunning summer brows with
silky sweat and melting ice-cream cones and coke,

and tripping-running-jumping till all
were happy-tired? What ever happened to
those syringa trees and brick sports-cars, when
rain would fall and we would play and dream and be

as snug as a bug in a rug? What ever
happened to all those songs and memories
and things we always seem to want to find, and the
day we left them out by accident, and lost them all to time?

Note: the German reads “...in his arms the child lay dead” from Goethe’s poem of the same name.

True Love

Mzana Mthimkhulu

Last Saturday afternoon, I lavished my girl with the highest love expression ever uttered. “I love you,” I cooed, as we walked side by side, “as much as I love Highlanders Football Club.”

Thoko stopped and stared at me in stunned disbelief. “You can’t mean that?” she finally asked when she found her voice.

“I do baby, every word,” I assured her, pleased with my gift of the gab. “My love for you equals that of...”

“Shut up Alex,” she hissed. “I have tolerated your craze for football, but this is now too much. In all my twenty-two years, I have never been so insulted. How can you compare me with, of all things, a football team?” There was anger and disgust in her voice.

I had always known that, like all women, my Thoko was emotional and unpredictable. But this was ridiculous. It was no secret that millions of women trudged through their lives without ever basking in the kind of love I had declared for her. To get it, thousands of girls would swim across crocodile infested rivers, walk across land-mined terrain and crawl over broken glass. Having got it, the girls would fall on their knees to thank God for their luck. Some would make long trips to their rural homes to pay homage to the spirits of their forefathers. Not Thoko. Instead, here she was, accusing me of insulting her.

“I never want to see you again,” she spat out. “Never.” Nose in the air, bust pushed forward, she quickly walked away. I trotted after her.

Thoko and I had been going out for a year. Two weeks back, we had agreed that it was time we got serious about our relationship. We drew up a plan of meeting our relatives. Her aunt in Mpopoma Township was the first on her relatives’ list. We had been on our way to her aunt when she red-carded me for using a wrong love expression.

I caught up with her as she went round the corner to her aunt’s house. “At least let us fulfil our promise of visiting your aunt,” I pleaded.

She stopped and roasted me with a look of contempt. “Nx, why don’t you just take a couple of Highlanders players with you and leave me out?” I wisely did not reply but kept alongside her when she resumed walking. Like a good defender, I was not going to be easily shaken off. Her aunt’s house was a five minute walk from the minibus stop.

“Okay,” Thoko snarled at me as we waited for the door to open after she had knocked, “Just this visit, then we go our separate ways. I am not going to play second fiddle to....” Before she finished, a tall stout lady in her forties opened the door. “Come in, come in,” the lady gushed, stepping back. I followed Thoko to the two seat sofa she chose. The room was neat and modestly furnished. On one of the walls there was a large framed photograph of two rows of women in church uniform. In the middle of the front row, there was Thoko’s aunt lighting up the picture with a smile.

To my relief, Thoko was not bent on carrying the quarrel into the house. She politely introduced me to her aunt. “Call her naka Douglas,” Thoko advised. “We all do.” We shook hands and commented on the heat-wave suffocating the country. There was silence for some seconds.

A tall elegant man with a sprinkling of white hair walked in from the kitchen. They say it’s a small world, but I blinked to make sure it was him. Yes indeed, it was Ncube. He smiled at us. “Meet my husband,” naka Douglas said, gesturing at the man.

“We know each other,” I said, stretching out my hand to shake his, “Well, sort of,” I added.

“I thought your face was familiar,” Ncube said slowly, his eyes narrowing. “Of course!” he exclaimed with the joy of a fan cheering an impressive build up by his side. “You are the lad who sits three rows away from my row.”

He turned to his wife and continued, “Him and I sit at the same grandstand at Barbourfields Stadium.”

Ncube greeted me a second time. But this time I merited more than a polite handshake. He demanded that I stood up. He hugged me the way politicians do when they meet on the airport tarmac.

“Actually, I sit two, not three, rows away from you,” I pointed out

as I sat down.

“You are right,” Ncube nodded.

Although we had never met outside Barbourfields Stadium, Ncube and I went a long way back. For ten years, we had sat near each other to cheer Highlanders. Ncube always delighted us with the string of insults he hurled at visiting teams and at referees judged to be biased against Highlanders. For him, a single decision against Highlanders was conclusive evidence of bias. On the other hand, the hallmark of a fair referee was a series of decisions against the visiting team.

He boasted with truth that he never used the same obscenity twice in one match. His booming voice could be heard right across the field. But it was Ncube’s inside knowledge of what went on in the football world which endeared him to us all.

Take what he told us a couple of Sundays back. We were having a cup game against arch rivals Dynamos. Their star player had just returned from trials with a number of British clubs. According to the papers, the player was in sparkling form. But they did not say why no club had signed him on.

“Do you know why no British club signed him on?” Ncube asked us just before kick off. Before anyone replied, he continued, “I know. The first thing the player was asked by the team manager of a well known British club was how things were at Highlanders Football Club. The player replied truthfully that he had never played for Highlanders.

‘Goodness me!’ the manager exclaimed. ‘You have never played for the only top flight football team in your country? So what are you doing here? We insist on quality and that means Highlanders. I am sorry, we have no room for you!’ Undaunted, the player tried other clubs. But the story was the same. They only wanted quality players. This is why the poor lad had to come back,” Ncube concluded. We enjoyed Ncube’s story and looked forward to retelling it outside the stadium.

Unfortunately, that afternoon the Dynamos player spoiled it all. Once play had started, he continually waltzed past Highlanders’ defenders at will. It was during one of his waltzes that he created Dynamos’ first goal. Never the ones to be pushovers, we equalised

within minutes. However, the British reject broke our hearts in the second half. From about forty yards he unleashed a volley which went past our keeper. Because of this player, we lost the match.

Just what was wrong with British clubs, we cursed as we left the stadium. Why had they not signed him up and saved us the agony of defeat? Nevertheless, we found comfort in Ncube's story. The player had failed to impress in Britain because he had not played for Highlanders.

Unlike at the stadium, Ncube at home was a well behaved man. He sat quietly on the sofa and seemed to defer to his wife. He could pass for a church deacon.

"So, besides watching football, what else do you do, young man?" naka Douglas asked me. Mentally I rephrased the question. "Look here, you football fanatic, what makes you think you are worthy of my niece – a well brought up girl, a second year student nurse and a beauty of rare quality?"

"I am a fitter," I told my interviewer.

"And what's that?" naka Douglas did not sound impressed.

"It's similar to a motor mechanic. Instead of cars, I fix big factory machines."

"I see," naka Douglas nodded, still not impressed, "Do you have to do a course before you can fix the machines?" Again, I mentally deciphered the question. "Is this job of yours high enough for a state registered nurse?"

"Oh yes. The job is quite complex. I completed a four year course two years ago. You need at least six 'O's to qualify for the course's entrance exam. I remember the week I wrote the entrance exam was after the Sunday I was baptised." Naka Douglas melted into a smile.

"Come Thoko," she commanded, "let us fix some drinks." The tone of her voice told me that I had made a good impression. As far as she was concerned, I was on my way to being accepted as part of the family. The two women went into the kitchen.

"I am in a bit of trouble," I confided to Ncube as soon as they were out of earshot. I quickly told him about the expression that had infuriated Thoko. Ncube raised both his eyebrows. "Love her as much as Highlanders!" he exclaimed. "That's true love, my boy. Love

minus zero, the ultimate.”

“I know, but it does not seem to have done me any good,” I moaned.

Ncube sighed, “With women, some things, though true, are best not said.” He shook his head in a manner which suggested that he was at a loss to understand the young. “Anyway, I will see what I can do about it.”

After a few seconds, Ncube spoke to me in a loud voice, “So, Alex, suppose you were to choose between watching the World Cup final and a Highlanders final at Barbourfields Stadium, which would you go for? The airfares for the World Cup would all be paid for.”

“I would choose the Highlanders game of course,” I said without hesitation. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Thoko in the kitchen. She was preparing drinks but could follow our conversation. I pretended not to have noticed her.

“Now come on Alex,” Ncube drawled. “You mean you would deny yourself the chance to fly abroad and witness football’s finest hour?”

I chuckled, “For me there could be no fine hour without Highlanders.”

“I don’t think you are aware of the importance of the World Cup. The tournament only comes once in every four years. It parades the world’s best footballers. No event in sports or whatever has more spectators. If the World Cup was a woman, it would be Miss World, who is also the best chef and the best mother. In short, she would score highest in all the attributes one looks for in a woman.”

“That may be so, but with the World Cup, I don’t belong, with Highlanders I do. I feel good sitting at Barbourfields Stadium in a crowd of forty thousand, all supporting one team. I feel good watching the boys in black and white run onto the field to the thunderous welcome of the crowd. I get dizzy with delight when the boys pour forward in search of a goal. My happiest moment on earth is when I watch a Highlanders’ player charge away joyfully after scoring. I dance, I chant, I hug anyone near me, I shout – you know the feeling Ncube. It is the ecstasy which marks the summit of life.”

“Yes,” he agreed with a knowing smile. “But you are not always

victorious. Sometimes you lose. There must be times when you hate Highlanders.”

“It hurts when we lose. But it does not in any way dim my love for the team. I understand its shortcomings. After all, they are only human. Hate them? How can I hate myself? When we lose, I just swallow the pain and live for another day when we will be victorious.”

“So much for the World Cup. Now, what if Highlanders got relegated to a lower league, would you still support it?”

“I will support it until the end of time,” I stated.

Ncube was about to say something when the two women walked in with a jug of orange squash and biscuits. Thoko poured out the drinks. Naka Douglas resumed her interview. She asked me about my family. I breezed through her questions like a super league team playing against a boozers’ outfit. It was overkill. I had already impressed her and her husband. Only Thoko remained.

After about an hour, I bade them farewell. I was delighted when Thoko stood up to leave with me. The Ncubes walked us to the bus stop.

“Come and see us again,” naka Douglas instructed before she and Ncube turned back.

“Would you really choose me over Miss World?” Thoko asked looking me in the eyes.

“No doubt about that,” I replied, “you are special.”

“And when I become old and wrinkled, will you still love me?”

“From the day I set my eyes on the team, my love for Highlanders has grown in leaps and bounds. The love is set to continue growing until the end of time. Need I say more?”

She smiled. “I can’t wait to see how you will get along with my uncle. Remember he is the next on my relatives’ list. And he is a Dynamos fanatic.”

I smiled back, “With you by my side, naka Douglas rooting for me and Ncube coaching me, I am ready to face all the soccer fans in Brazil.”

Man in Stocking

Anne Simone Hutton

The frog-smile was an afterthought;
the skin made of raindrops,
peppersize, on touching a beaded evening
bag, wrinkled wrist and ankle
of something recently hatched,

a chameleon, dangling from vine-
tails, had itself crucified between
chopsticks, quite dopest from musty earth
and slowed by a hanging-fever.
Shivers through air-padded limbs

had sent a saw across its spine
and scissorhands had clutched twigs,
had thinned and pulled like plasticine
what was a ball of bones. Then it mimicked
an air-eater running off rolls of sellotape

tongue which snapped back with a trophy.
And gurgled with satisfaction. Only a wise man
wears a stocking, coloured with the mood
of a road or plant, ready to become the meaning
of his journey, the space he travels.

A Seed of Hope

Masimba Manyonga

Back in the days when the zeal for the Chimurenga incessantly simmered in his blood with such lively vigour, fellow fighters had given him the cognomen Nigger X. But those were the days then. Today he is a sad, lonely and one legged old man. He has developed the rather puerile habit of polishing the artificial tip fixed at the end of his maimed leg, pothering about the rains and recalling the days of the struggle when he still had both legs. He recalls running, taking cover behind a bush, cocking his gun and taking aim at the enemy ... pulling the trigger and releasing ... then the sound of death. Those had been the days then, days when he had fought fearlessly for the liberation of the land. Everybody needed the land. The old people and the young people alike, they all needed the land. And X, together with his fellow comrades, was determined to see the land returned back to its owners. And he was determined to fight to the very end.

Nigger X sits on the stone facing the entrance to his pole and dagga hut, the roof of which has the appearance of an old straw hat worn on the lee side of an old man's head, looking like it would fall down with the slightest touch of the wind. Nearby, further to the east, is the stretch of field he had earlier on prepared for planting, bare and scorched lifeless. The few grasses which had the guts to sprout out bear a haggard appearance, hopelessly dying in the treacherous sun. Invisible tears begin to form under his shrunken eyelids. The rains are hopelessly late and X fears another drought.

Nigger X shifts on the stone, feeling uneasy. It feels like one of his buttocks is gashed on the side. He tries to relax, shielding his eyes from the terrible sunrays piercing deep into his soul. He adjusts his old threadbare hat. He feels like he is sitting on a mat of thorns. X moves his crippled leg and his torso aches. A loud sound escapes from his bowels as his intestines contort once again in a desperate clamour for food. For three days now, the man has not eaten anything. The few grains of maize meal in the clay pot cannot help. He is so hungry. But hunger is slowly becoming part of his daily life, as if he entered into a

memorandum of understanding with it. Still failing to relax, X shifts again. Then he reaches for his crutch and struggles up. He stands for a moment, leaning his good leg against the stone, feeling so sad. There are so many things he doesn't understand, so many worries and so many fears. Underneath, the soil is boiling, sending pulses of heat into the cracks of his foot. X positions the crutch comfortably in his armpit and hobbles towards his hut, doddering and tottering like a small baby. He settles down in the shade of his hut, resting the crutch on his side. He cups his cheeks in both palms.

Soon, X is lost in the hazy mazes of his mind. So much seems to be going wrong. Things seem to be getting worse by the day and life in the rural areas is proving tougher than X ever thought possible. When he got the plot, X had such a thrill in tilling the land and in becoming a worker of the soil, but alas the rains won't come. Everywhere everything is grey and lifelessly pale. Hope is slowly fading away for the season in hand. X wishes things would change and the heavens would open up the floodgates a little. So much is going wrong. Young people are fleeing the country and the land is plunging into recession by the day. Soon, X fears, this land will be home to just toddlers and wintry people. If only it would rain, God knows how much the people want to till the land. If only it would rain, all these things would get back into line. If only it would rain. There would be no economic slump, no war and no hunger.

Nigger X is so lonely. He rises up with the aid of his crutch and limps into his hut. He stops, the persistent hunger eating at his intestines. He is choking and he feels dizzy. Then he quickly sits down to avoid crumpling into a heap on the floor. He is dazed. He tries to fight the hunger off ... another losing game. X is baffled. Why is it not raining? Why does the land have so many enemies, local and foreign? Why are they seeking to destroy the land through their sanctions and lies? Is it a crime to reclaim what belongs to you, what rightfully belongs to you and your people? No! No! X feels a surge of power filtering through his veins to his pumping heart. The land belongs to the people! X bellows it out. There are so many problems facing the land, so much confusion and so much sickness, both of the body and the mind, but the land still belongs to the people. Rain or no rain,

nothing can change that. Politics or no politics, the land belongs to the people! X is becoming infuriated, at no one in particular.

Nigger X remembers the war and how tough it was. He had fought so diligently alongside his comrades. The issue of the land was the medicine which gave them new strength each time they felt like giving up. How they suffered in the bush, fighting tooth and nail against the enemy. And now, how can anyone say the land should not be allocated to the masses suffering all over the country? Insanity! X curses through his teeth. A bomb had claimed his leg, forcing him to leave the battlefield. He feels anger growing deep in his heart. He holds his head forcefully in his palms, as if to granulate it into small fragments. He feels the pain and he lets out a piercing cry, which seems to have been torn from the very depths of his soul. A terrible ache spreads gradually from one end of his head to the other, causing him to feel as if someone is smacking the intersection of his nose and his forehead with a log. He feels so detached, so alone and desolate. Everything around him suddenly begins to swirl, swooshing and twisting his line of balance into a whirlpool of staggering and gyration. X tries to get up, resting his full weight upon one leg, but fails, falling into a heap on the ground with a single thud. He remains still, heart pounding and head aching. X tries to fight it off, but, in the end, he faints, the hunger and the pain overwhelming him.

When X comes to, his stomach still aches for food. All these things will soon come to an end and the rains will soon come, he soothes himself, endeavouring to ignore the calls for food from his belly. Things will get better. The rains will come. The currency will gain and the young people will embark on another journey, this time back into their own land. Soon everyone will be able to till their plots and produce crops. Soon other nations will envy this country like before. X and his comrades hold on to their hope.

The hunger announces itself once more. X has to eat something. He goes to sit on his stone, to peruse the sky for a sign of rain. None. The sky has the appearance of a boring page of text with no punctuation. The sun blazes on, mercilessly devouring any remaining vegetation. X decides he has to do something about his hunger. If he faints again, he may fail to make it. He cannot die, not now. The

present Chimurenga has to be won. It has to be and he has to see it to the very end. He decides that the only thing to do is to slaughter one of his remaining two chickens, sell the other one and visit his nephew in the city.

As soon as X hits the city of Bulawayo, he is flabbergasted. Everywhere he looks, his eyes meet with long winding queues snaking through the sanitary lanes. He had never thought the situation could be this bad. X moves closer to one queue.

“What is this for, my son? Is money being given out here?” he inquires.

A young man turns and thoroughly examines him before laughing a laugh full of contempt.

“Money, old man, you have to be out of your dim wits. Who do you think would dish out money to anyone in this corrupt economy, huh?”

X moves away and approaches an old woman jostling between two youths in the long queue.

“Ah, mamazala, if I may ask ... but what is this queue for?”

“Salt, mkwenyana, salt. I have been here for God knows how long, but the salt has not been delivered yet. Yesterday I almost fainted in another queue for sugar. Mkwenyana! What has become of our land is beyond me.” She jostles again, prodding with her flesh starved elbows and squeezing herself into position between the swearing youths. X moves away. He enters Jason Moyo Street and heads down towards the Gallery. He switches roads and enters Main Street. There are queues everywhere. One by Bakers Inn opposite the Unity Village flea market, one by the Tredgold Building and another one for cars by the BSS. X feels so tired, so worn out. He sits by the Post Office for a rest before proceeding towards Northend where his nephew stays. By his side there is a youth singing a reggae song. X catches the words; “too much pressure on the pipol say it’s too much ... good lord ... tings na raise by day again ... but az you sleep it raise by night ... almosah ghost.” X shakes his head. He feels so weary. He decides to take a bus, but the queues zigzagging in circuitous tails all over the terminus discourage him. There are only two kombis loading passengers. The

rest are in the queue for fuel, X judges. He asks an old man standing by the lavatory near maMoyo's food cabin.

"Ah, mfowethu! There is no transport in this city. There is no fuel. The few kombis available charge thrice the normal fare! What injustice."

This does it for X and he wanders away in short steps, his body drained of energy and his head drooped. Becoming aware of hunger again, X wonders how people in the city are surviving. With all these queues! Even salt is being queued for! Salt, of all commodities! This is totally insane, X thinks. Surely there are some unscrupulous businessmen withholding these basic commodities from the people. As he nears Highlanders Sports Club, he wonders why there are so many Vapostori women in the streets, so many of them. Maybe they are praying for the country? X tries to hobble faster, wishing he had both legs. He notices a young fellow roasting maize cobs by the roadside opposite Coronation Cottages. Where does he get fresh cobs from, X wonders? His mouth waters with a craving for a taste. And the hunger. He approaches.

"Ah, my son."

"Ah, mdala, zithini?"

"Hunger, my son, hunger. If only you could be of good heart and maybe give me a piece."

The young fellow smiles a sorry smile at X, holding the end of a wire pierced into the cob he is roasting.

"Ah, mdala wethu. Uyazi izinto azimanga kuhle ngikutshele ... there is nothing I can do for you, mdala wethu, nothing. These cobs, my wife's uncle's cousin's mother's husband has a small garden, which he irrigates using sewage water, and I only managed to buy a few cobs from him, so you see, I cannot afford to." He makes a gesture with his hand as X leaves.

Listening, all the way X hears things. Gossip. Speculation. Of killings and of abductions. Robberies. Of tribalism. Of many things. Many fears. Of hunger ... hunger. X only hopes to find his nephew home. He is getting seriously hungry. He needs something to put into his stomach or he will faint again. Fainting, he fears fainting. In fact, he has so many fears. He fears mosquitoes and he fears rats. He has

always feared rats, especially at bedtime, a rat sneaking up on him and feasting on the tip of his maimed leg, ripping off chunks of meat. Rats. Especially that big rat that used to sniff at the maize bag. That sneaky creature with the reddish eyes, he hated it when the sharp rabid eyes peered yearningly at the stump of his leg.

He knows he will not stay in the city longer than necessary. Already, he is planning his journey back to his piece of land. There he will wait patiently for the rains. And the rains will come. And he will till like a possessed man. Did the Ministry not promise tillage facilities and seed? He will go back to his plot soon and wait for the rains.

After a lengthy discussion about the problems facing the country, politics and rumours of war in the Gulf, X and his nephew finally settle down for the evening meal. A cup of lemon tea each and six skinny buns, naturally shared three apiece. X hurriedly consumes his share, wishing the tea had enough sugar. Before long, the hunger in his stomach suddenly rises up like the spirit of a demon emerging out of deep water in the form of a monstrous whale to tear his belly apart. A long silence follows.

“Ah, sekuru, did you hear that Kule Sikipisi is no more? They say he was crushed under thousands of stampeding feet when the riot police fired tear gas at striking workers.”

“Ah, that,” X shakes his head. “Baba aJemu brought the sad news when it happened. We heard he died a painful death.”

Another silence follows as each man concentrates on the small black and white TV screen. There is a Hondo Yeminda tune playing. War. It brings memories to his mind. Memories of the Chimurenga. And then he is in the war. And he has both legs. He is agile. Soon the war will be over and the enemy will flee. The masses will take back the land and a brother or sister will take over the reins. And he is crouching behind a bush. A chill runs down his spine. His hairs stand erect. Then the bullets. He is running furiously, clutching his gun. Running. Cries of pain and silence of death. He heads for the thicket, still clutching his gun. Then the loud bang and he is in the air, part of his leg ripped apart. He falls down and lies still for a few moments. He rises up, feeling no pain. He looks around and sees part of his leg

lying in a pool of blood a yard or so from him, still wearing the shoe. He also sees the bleeding stump of his leg. His eyes widen in horror and a gagging sound escapes from his throat. His body is sagging. X begins to urinate and vomit spews from his windpipe. He bends over, gagging and retching furiously. He takes a piece of cloth from his pocket and begins to wipe bits of vomit from his clothes. He feels sick and ...

“Sekuru, are you okay?”

“Oh, yes I am ... oh yes ... it’s just that ...” X struggles to speak and gives up. He closes his eyes and wipes a trickle of sweat from his forehead. He shifts, trying hard to relax the stump of his leg.

“Sekuru, you ought to sleep ... you think too much and this is affecting you. Come now, catch some sleep.”

X climbs onto the bed and draws a blanket over his head. The next morning, X wakes to the sound of thick drops pounding against the metal roof of his nephew’s lodgings. A wide smile on his face, he leans over to open the curtains. It is finally over! The rains have come ... have come! Hondo Yeminda is in full swing now, praise the Lord. The rains have come ... have come! It sounds like a song in his heart. And he knows that he has to return to his plot without delay. Now that the rains have come, nothing is going to stop him, nothing. And things are on track. Hunger will soon be over. No more fuel problems. No more shortages ... no more queues ... no more mayhem. It is all over! All over!

Reverie on a Dark Beauty

John S. Read

Beauty deep in black Mutoko granite
cannot bring the moon rim's light
alive with woman's laughing call.
Carved in contrast, this steel light falls
on velvet enigmas of your form.
As the sun follows soft calf dawn
you will arise in sleep-eyed shadows,
unfolding in rock bright cotton colours
to catch the breeze that fills your fields
with chattering maize. As a flower she kneels,
offering cupped aromas for an old man's senses.
And when inertial heat brings in the morning's fences,
so slips this curlèd Venus into shadow streams as dappled rain
until the dove calls your dark beauty into folds of night again.

Bicycles and the Social History of Bulawayo

Terence Ranger

Introduction

The University philosopher, David Kaulemu, has recently discussed the ‘early history of the bicycle as a technical object’. Kaulemu says that the bicycle seems to be just a technical invention, ‘designed by experts in their secluded workshops’. But in fact the very nature of the bicycle was uncertain – some inventors designed it as a racing machine, others as a vehicle. ‘There were debates about what a bicycle ultimately was.’ So the bicycle is an ‘ambiguous object’ and it was ‘actually a political project, shaped by the needs and interests of varied groups’.

This philosophical discussion is very relevant to the history of the bicycle in Bulawayo, where it has been used for so many different things by so many different people. Here I can best describe this history as a series of snapshots of different uses at different times. The first is of the ‘European bicycle’ in the 1890s.

European Bulawayo as the Town of the Bicycle

‘It is a curious fact’, writes D.L.Thompson in his *A History of Sport in Southern Rhodesia*, ‘that the country’s cycling activities have been confined almost entirely to Bulawayo.’

The first white residents of the town brought bicycles up from South Africa as soon as Bulawayo was marked out as a white town. They brought in both ‘roadsters’ and racing bikes. A ‘roadster’ cost 45 shillings and a racing bike a good deal more.

‘There was a time’, Thompson says, ‘when everyone who could afford to rode a bicycle. Mr Rhodes was the only exception. Nothing could persuade him to give up his beloved pony for the iron contraption on wheels’. But the ‘Rhodesians’ rode bicycles everywhere.

They used them for many different purposes. They used them to

ride from their homes to their offices. They used them to go for picnics in the countryside. But they also used them to race. The first cycle race took place in 1895; the first racing club was formed in 1896. 'In 1896 the Queen's Club built a cycle track which will remain forever in the memories of the old riders. It was, to all intents and purposes, square, and four and one-eighth laps to the mile. It was banked on the "home" corner only, with the result that the riders often went over the top into Grey Street. In spite of many disadvantages, however, some exciting events took place on this track.'

On occasion the social and racing uses of the bicycle were combined. The King's Club, formed in 1901, held 'social outings when about a hundred cyclists would turn out. They formed two groups, the fast squad who put their heads down and raced for the picnic, and the "steadies" who did the journey in comfort.' Of course, cycling was not only for whites only, but also for men only. Ladies came to the picnics in cape carts.

Rhodesian whites used bicycles for military purposes too. During the uprising of 1896 white cyclists 'rode dispatches between Bulawayo and the outlying laagers'. They did the same in South Africa during the Boer War.

The early colonial European bicycle is immortalized in surviving photographs. There is a photograph in the Bulawayo Club of settlers greeting the arrival of the first train; each man holds his bicycle. In the National Archives in Harare there is a photo of 'the Bulawayo Amater (sic) Cycle Club' meeting at the Umguza Hotel in September 1898. The cyclists sport straw hats and cloth caps; many wear bow ties. They are all young and male. The most famous early Bulawayo photograph of a bicycle – the 'Modern Matabele Maiden', in traditional dress, astride a bicycle, with one foot on a rock to hold her steady – is an expression of fantasy rather than reality. The absurdity of a black person, and a woman at that, being able to afford to ride a bicycle was what made the photo funny and ensured that it had a brisk sale as a postcard.

The African Bicycle in the Late 1920s and 1930s

In fact the sale of the bicycle followed the same trajectory as the sale of the camera – first only to European men; then to European women; then to African men; and finally to African women. The bicycle, though, was a more expensive investment. By 1930 the Hercules bicycle cost five pounds five shillings at a time when very few Africans earned more than twenty shillings a month. Nevertheless, as soon as the *Native Mirror* started in 1933 it carried bicycle advertisements – the famous one of the black cyclist outpacing the lion – and by that time many African men had bought cycles. (In the year ended June 1929 the Bulawayo City Council collected nine hundred and sixty four pounds from the sale of cycle licences to Africans).

When he revisited Bulawayo in 1930, Kingsley Fairbridge expressed his astonishment at how much the city had changed since his last stay there in 1918: ‘I must confess that since the Great War I had not been inland at all. It was startling to look at the Bulawayo of 1930 ... The native servants, including delivery boys and labourers, ride good bicycles through the main thoroughfares, astonishing one who could only think back to the times when the push bike was the aristocratic preserve of the white man.’ (*The Chronicle*, 2 July 1930)

By this time Africans were also using the bicycle for many different purposes. For some it was a transport necessity and worth the investment of six months’ salary. In the 1930s at least half the African men who lived in Bulawayo did not live in the Municipal Location. Very many lived out beyond the town commonage as rent-payers on ‘white’ farms. There the men were able to run cattle and the women to cultivate gardens – and to brew beer. Some of the best paid African men – clerks and foremen and teachers – lived out on the farms. Every day these men cycled the ten miles or more across the commonage to work and then back again at night. (On rare occasions they carried their wives, riding pillion, to visit the Bulawayo shops). There were no buses; it was too far to walk to and fro; the bicycle was essential to their way of life – a technology which gave them some freedom of choice.

The bicycle was also used for less industrious purposes. At the weekends, men living in the Municipal Location travelled out to drink beer on Hyde Park and other farms – the white press reported long and steady lines of cyclists going out of town and long and unsteady lines of cyclists coming back. There were African racing cyclists at this early date too, even though there was no African racing track and they had to use the highway. In December 1929 two African ‘racing cyclists’ were fined in court for dangerous driving, after racing each other, heads down, along the main city thoroughfare.

The bicycle was a piece of colonial technology which had been adapted by the colonized. And it was not only used for work and pleasure. It was also a prestige object in its own right. Together with very smart clothes, the young ‘Manyika’ men, whose pretensions were so much resented by other workers, owned smart bicycles, which they painted and polished and showed off. In December 1929, when these ‘Manyika’ were driven out of the Railway Compound by Northern and Ndebele workers, their bicycles fell victim. ‘All the clothing, bicycles and other belongings of some 300 to 400 Manicaland natives living in the Railway Location had been seized by the Matabeles’, reported *The Chronicle* on 4 January 1930, ‘placed in nine or ten huge piles and set alight’. In the general fighting which followed in the Town Location and the commonage, various weapons were used, among them ‘bicycle chains attached to short sticks which could be used to tremendous effect’ and were ‘possibly the most deadly of all weapons.’

Despite the bonfires and the fighting, bicycles continued to be objects of desire, and the young dandies who owned and decorated them were not only ‘Manyikas’. In February 2001 old Moses Mthombeni remembered his youth in the late 1940s:

‘When we were growing up as young men (Moses was born in 1929) we used to compete in dressing. If one bought his nice shirt I would buy my own also. The same applies if a friend bought a shoe. I would go out and buy one, if not a better pair. We bought our bicycles which we decorated and polished for them to be shining. There came new black tyres which took us by storm. We would buy a chain cover and paint it white. Have your own pump and buy a bicycle stand.

Then one would polish it and put it in the sun. You would see it shining. We were competing in smartness not beer. When we cycled to our rural homes, people would know there is so and so who is very smart. We would wear our Scotch shirts and suits and “button-by” hats. They were called “Christian roll-away”. We would argue with girls and tell them to sit on the hat. A very big woman would sit on it and when she stood up it went “psh”, returning to its original state.’

The African Bicycle in the 1950s: Coming of Age

By 1950 there were some fifteen thousand people in the townships with bicycle licences. Cycle manufacturers vied with each other to boost their products. The *Bantu Mirror* of 18 February 1950 carried a photograph of a Hercules bike at the Victoria Falls. ‘Beauty is allied with power in this tremendous natural spectacle, just as beauty and power are combined in your Hercules bicycle’. In the same issue, BSA bikes showed a smart young man, tennis racket slung over his shoulder, riding one of their models: ‘The richest man in the world could not buy a finer machine’. A later ad in the same series showed a working man and asserted that the richest man in the world could not buy a stronger machine; and there was even a drawing of a woman riding a bike saying that the richest man in the world could not buy a more elegant machine.

By the early 1950s young African women were buying bikes too, out of their wages as nurses and domestic servants. In 1952 the Gertrude MacIntyre hostel for girls in Makokoba was obliged to provide a bicycle shed. Just as it had been for young men, so the bicycle became a supreme prestige object for young women. Photos began to appear in the African press of African beauties with their bikes – Auxilia Supriane in November 1954 as a ‘beautiful surprise, holding her bicycle ready to go to work’; Maina Mpofu posing with her cycle in January 1959 and assuring other girls that photos did no harm.

Old Mthombeni remembers the impression these young women cyclists made: ‘On Saturday ladies from the Suburbs would come for dancing competitions. They were very special ladies. They worked in

the kitchens in the Suburbs. We did not go for the Location girls but for those from the Suburbs who were given everything by their employers. Ladies who worked in Northend knocked off work on Friday around 2pm. They cycled to the township in a spectacular manner. On Saturday and Sunday when people went to watch soccer at Barbour Fields stadium you would see a chain of bicycles lined up in a beautiful manner, the girls heading for the stadium. I lived for a long time in Makokoba. I married staying there and my wife was one of those who rode the beautiful cycles. She worked at Northend. We married in 1951.'

Old women remember how their 'stiff' petticoats flared out as they rode on their cycles and how every male eye was caught.

They also remember how they themselves admired the best male cyclists. By the end of the 1950s cycle racing had become an African sport, attracting crowds of over ten thousand spectators. A banked cycle track was erected at Barbour Fields and a second at White City, the latter 'built to international standard'. In July 1963 the Alpha Athletic and Cycling Club sent 5 runners and 2 cyclists down to South Africa to compete in the Non-European championships.

The bicycle wheel had turned full circle. 'The country's cycling activities' still took place largely in Bulawayo, but now the champion Bulawayo cyclists were black.

The Boxing Day Clashes of 1929

Pathisa Nyathi

Makokoba, 1929. Reeking air pervades the entire place. Swarms of green flies, green bombers they call them, add to the unwholesome atmosphere. These vegetable coloured insects are habitual citizens of dirty places. They ensure equitable distribution of filth.

Palls of smoke snake their way out of robust chimneys. Rusty iron sheets provide cover to the small, haphazardly laid out dwellings. The smell of extinguished kerosene lamps harasses people's nostrils. Water flows everywhere, making puddles of water here and there, where mosquitoes find a permanent cradle for their young; the winged fiends that have the capacity to send men into uncontrollable fits of death. But who cares in this new type of settlement with a new type of chief, the white man.

The sources of water are the numerous communal water taps that litter this settlement. Women come to fetch water from the taps. They expertly balance the iron water containers on their heads - in the fashion that they used to do with clay pots back in the rural areas.

Narrow alleys separate rows of houses. The better looking houses are referred to as the marriage cottages. Barrack accommodation houses factory and railway workers. The township was never conceived as a permanent settlement. Emerging white enterprises needed black labour. There were factories that needed unskilled hands. Roads and dams were being constructed. These all needed unsophisticated black labour which was generally poorly paid. It was never the intention of the whites to live side by side with the blacks, whom they generally regarded with contempt. It would take just one year for them to promulgate the notorious Land Apportionment Act which, in essence, legalised and formalised the social segregation of the black and white races.

Makokoba, or simply the Location, is on the western side of the town of Bulawayo, which was established in 1894, following the demise of the Ndebele state in 1893. A stream flows on the eastern side of the settlement. There is a bigger one on the western side,

which they call Mazai, a Shona word for eggs. Effluent from Bulawayo's heavy industries is spewed into the stream giving it a distinctive odour akin to the smell of rotten eggs. In the early days residents of Makokoba fetched water from the streams. That was before the installation of public water taps. Various diseases like hookworm and bilharzia afflicted the populace. In addition to the public water taps, there were communal bathrooms. Water streamed from these two water sources, forming puddles of water that were an eyesore and a health hazard. There were no flush latrines at the time. Public toilets were provided with squat holes leading to buckets which served as receptacles for human excreta. From time to time the buckets were emptied into wagons drawn by mules. The oppressive stench emanating from the buckets was a draw card to the green bombers, with their sharp sense of smell. At times residents would have been confronted by steaming human excreta in the dark narrow alleys, where it had been deposited by non-caring citizens.

The settlement was administered by the Sanitary Board in the early stages of its establishment. Later, the Municipality of Bulawayo took over this responsibility. The black man in the Location was needed only for his labour, otherwise he was a nuisance that was not to be seen or heard. There were no social amenities to talk about. Churches proliferated: the Salvation Army, Wesleyan Methodist, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Church of Christ and American Methodist Episcopal, most of which came to Southern Rhodesia in the wake of colonisation. On their own initiative, people organised boxing matches, *ibhakleyi*, in the area where Renkini stands today. In 1926 two royal princes, Rhodes and Albert, became instrumental in the establishment of the first black soccer club - Lions Football Club. It was later to become Matabeleland Highlanders and finally Highlanders. A few years later it was followed by Mashonaland United, known today as Zimbabwe Saints.

All along there had been no black trade union movement to champion the interests of black workers. In 1927 Robert Sambo had been sent by Clements Kadalie to organise workers in Southern Rhodesia. He was to set up a branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). He was however deported from the country. It

took Masotsha Ndlovu, with trade union experience from Cape Town, to establish the ICU in Southern Rhodesia. He had a house in the Location and went about his trade union activities from there.

Workers, including railway workers housed in barrack accommodation, were poorly paid. As a result of poor wages, the workers were often malnourished. Anti-social activities became common. Gambling schools were set up, prostitution was rife, theft and pilfering were rampant. Muggings by tsotsis were a feature of the crime landscape of the township. Illicit brews were concocted and consumed in illegal outlets. In 1930 Masotsha Ndlovu was to remark, “It is a wonder to me that you are not all thieves. You get 30 shillings and out of this you pay 18 shillings rent, leaving 12 shillings. How do you live?”

The untenable economic situation would culminate, in December of 1929, in brutal clashes of an ethnic dimension between Shona and Ndebele residents of the Location. The year 1929 was characterised by a world wide economic slump, generally referred to as the Great Depression. The 10,000 people in the Location were not spared the hardships. Business slumped. Factories closed down. There were large scale retrenchments. Poverty set in and wreaked havoc on the fabric of worker solidarity.

Prior to the onset of the Great Depression, the Ndebele dominated the affairs of the Location. Ndebele women ran the business of beer brewing. That was before the Municipality took over the lucrative enterprise. Beer halls in the Location still bear the names of the early women involved in traditional beer brewing: MaDlodlo and MaKhumalo. The Location was situated not far from the former Ndebele monarch’s capital, also known as Bulawayo. At the time of the establishment of the Location, its composition was predominantly Ndebele. Many Ndebele, however, continued living in rural areas just outside the Location. MaDlodlo, Siphambaniso Khumalo’s mother, Matshazi and Magagula were some of the prominent women leading a rural life close to the sprawling urban settlement at that time. As work opportunities arose in and around Bulawayo, people from various ethnic groups, including Tonga, Nyanja and Shona, started trickling in. Many of the Tonga, called Amazambezi by the Ndebele, were

employed by the City Council and lived in the Vundu area. Rhodesia Railways, already a major employer, built a railway compound near to where Sidojiwe Flats are located today. The majority of people housed in the barrack type accommodation were men of Zambian (mainly Lozi) and Malawian origin. One effect of the closure of farming operations and factories in Mashonaland was the off-loading of Shona workers. Restless and uncertain about the future, some of these workers, mainly men, trekked to Bulawayo and went to live in the Location.

The influx of the Shona in 1929 boosted their proportion in relation to that of the Ndebele. Competition for scarce jobs led to ethnic ill feeling. The two groups had hitherto generally lived apart. On their part, the Ndebele became uneasy about the increased presence of the Shona. They saw them as coming to take their jobs. Nor were Ndebele men comfortable with Shona men proposing love to their daughters and sisters. Language was also a barrier to communication. These issues led to friction developing between the two major groups.

Christmas time was always a time of revelry, where beer was consumed to excess. Scuffles often broke out on Boxing Day – often misunderstood to mean a day for fighting. On Boxing Day in 1929, the atmosphere became particularly charged and ethnic clashes erupted in the Location. The headline in *The Chronicle* of 28 December read ‘Rowdy Natives in Bulawayo: Prompt Police Action averts Disorder’. The article continued: ‘About sunset last evening, townspeople in Bulawayo were alarmed by rumours that there was serious trouble among natives in the locations. Some of these stories even went as far as to specify the numbers killed and injured. Inquiries of police officials last night disclosed that mounted and foot police, together with native constables, had been stationed at the Bulawayo location and the Railway location and had succeeded in quelling the trouble.’

Skirmishes had flared early in the evening. Groups of Ndebele were demanding that whoever they came across speak a few tongue twisting click sounds in their language, ‘Wothi nxa, wothi iqhele!’ Whoever failed to say the words, or said them with a distinct Shona

accent, was beaten up. The Ndebele were armed with knobkerries, while the Shona men carried knives. One name on the lips of the marauding Ndebele was that of James Mambara, a well known Shona resident of the Location. He had made friends with the Ndebele and was fairly fluent in their language. He had an Ndebele girlfriend, as did several of his Shona friends, despite the common phrase amongst Ndebele girls at the time, 'Ngeke ngilale loMtshabi mina!' (I can't fall in love with a Shona boy). In the company of other Shona men, Mambara reportedly approached a house wherein lived a Khumalo boy. Arriving at the door he shouted 'Mfihla, mfihla' (hide me, hide me). When the door was flung open, his entourage streamed into the house and one of them fatally stabbed the Khumalo boy.

The Chronicle reported: 'As far as can be ascertained, the trouble is tribal in origin and is not unusual around Christmas time. During the afternoon a large number of natives left the Railway location and proceeded towards the Bulawayo location. As they crossed the Forestvale Road, however, a number of mounted police armed with batons drove them back.'

Some Shona sought refuge in suburban houses, but the Ndebele followed and flushed them out. Some boarded the Salisbury train to flee the skirmishes, among them James Mambara. Incidents continued, but mounted police and foot patrols managed to bring the situation under control. *The Chronicle* reported: 'Just after dinner, a large number of natives on the Bellevue Road became rowdy, and mounted police quickly rode to the place, where a crowd had already collected. Things soon quietened down, however, and the batons, which had been given to a number of citizens in case they were required, were handed back.' Police patrols continued throughout the evening and during the night.

What had started off as intense competition for the scarce jobs, a situation occasioned by the world wide Great Depression, ended up as fierce and brutal ethnic clashes. Several individuals were instrumental in bringing about reconciliation between the two groups. Native Commissioner Mqangabhodo advised the residents to live together amicably, 'You have lost your political power. We are now in charge. When we employ you, we look for the strongest man. Language is not

a criterion.' Leading Ndebele chiefs, including Ngundu Masuku, Tatazela Khumalo and Ntola Khumalo, were also involved in discussions about reconciliation. Another leading figure in quelling the ethnic feuds was Mary Mutoko, a tall heavily built Shona woman and well known gambler who was feared and listened to by the men. This 'amazon' played a leading role in pacifying the Shona. As a result of the efforts of these and others, peace between the two groups was re-established in the Location.

One Man's View of the World

Reflections on a plan to return Rhodes' bones to England

A.D.C. Hyland

One man's view of the world embraces
More than mine or yours: did he stand on others'
Shoulders, seeing much further than they?
Or did he stand on higher ground, scanning
A more distant horizon, far away?

This man's view of the world, and his role in it,
Painted half a continent red, representing
The dominions of the empress queen he served,
And claimed for himself a role in governing them.
He was no emperor, though he behaved like one,
Wielding the weapons that empowered him –
The telegraph, the railroad and the maxim gun.

No doubt his view of the world was moulded by
The lessons he'd been taught at school, the songs he'd sung:
Of heroes, soldiers, brave and loyal men,
Like Alexander, conqueror of half the world,
And Arthur and Alfred, defenders of Albion.
They fought to retrieve their countries' honour: and although
No trace of them survives, their memories live on.

His memory survives here, too, certainly:
But what of the land he'd claimed as his own,
Embraced by the view from this high hill?
Where range after range of whaleback ridges
And rocky kopjes march into the far distances?
And what of the people who'd grazed their cattle,
Tended their crops, and eked a hard living
There: were they defeated in battle?

He'd bought the land for a song: and bequeathed it
To the infant nation he had founded
And had named after him: had he in mind Valhalla,
Or the High Hill of Tara? Who knows? The echoes
Of all their myths and legends reverberate here.
Had he a role for the people he'd subdued,
Whose land it was and always had been, and who trusted him?
He knew his spirit would not rest in peace
Among all their ancestral spirits, till
The necessary rites had been performed – both his and theirs –
And their custodians placated. This was done
In his high-handed way. Leaving the land
Implacable, under the burning African sun.

His restless spirit haunts this place
Still, now, a hundred years on;
But the vision he saw from here has faded
And his view of the world is no more.
Will his spirit remain, after the bones have gone?

Developing Rhodes' Grave

Jackson Ndlovu

Cecil John Rhodes died on the 26 March 1902. He had made his fortune in South Africa and had at one time been the Prime Minister of the Cape Province. He had made it clear that he wanted to be buried at World's View in the Matopo Hills. "Grey and I have made a wonderful discovery: we have found a hill from the top of which a marvellous view of the world is to be seen. I shall be buried here ... and the remains of Alan Wilson and his party must be brought here also." His remains were carried northward for interment; the whole proceeding being described as a 'majestic Imperial spectacle.' The coffin was made of Rhodesian teak draped in black and purple. A special train was designed and made and, in the words of his admirers, 'Rhodes once again was leading the way to the north.' His ambitious dream, of constructing a railway line from Cape to Cairo, was to end in the Matopo Hills near to the grave of the founder of the Ndebele state, Mzilikazi, who lies buried at the foot of Entumbane Hill, north east of World's View.

The Matopos have been inhabited since the Early Stone Age, firstly by the Bushmen/San and then by pastoral Bantu people. The entire range of hills is a magic - religious setting. Scenes of ceremonial practices and ritual gatherings are evident on the ground and caves. To many Zimbabweans, the Matopos are part of the national religious heritage, an inspirational place set aside by the gods for worship. In Terence Ranger's book *Voices from the Rocks*, the hills are described as a constant reminder of the nationhood of a people whose values and traditions should be restored, respected, defended and loved. In his article *Whose Heritage? The Case for Matopos*, Ranger identifies different tribes in Zimbabwe that have had a special relationship with the Hills: the Banyubi, the Kalanga, the Ndebele and then the whites. The Mwali cult is centred on the most sacred place in the Hills, located some fifty kilometres from Rhodes' grave. To the Ndebele people, the Matopo Hills are the resting place of their king, Mzilikazi, and to them the Hills are full of spirits. The

name of the hill, Malindidzimu, means ‘the holes in which the spirits dwell’. It is generally accepted by the Ndebele people that their chiefs acted correctly in telling the firing party at Rhodes’ burial to respect the presence of the spirits, as the firing of the volleys would disturb the peace of others buried nearby. These include the spirits of the rulers of the indigenous people, whose bones are found in the caves and elsewhere. The spirit of Mwali at the Njelele Shrine is still worshipped, although the voice has, since the arrival of the white man, decided to speak only to the possessed, in case the white man steals the land around it and makes the local population pay to talk to their gods.

It is in these Hills that Cecil John Rhodes decided he would be buried. In the Rhodesian era, his grave was a place for white pilgrimage and celebration. New white settlers arriving in Rhodesia often travelled to the grave, especially close to the anniversary of Rhodes’ death. The site was a reminder of a colonial triumph against the Ndebele. At one time there was an exhibition showing photographs of Ndebele atrocities during the 1896 uprisings. Rhodes’ grave was a symbol of Rhodesia.

Why then talk about developing Rhodes’ grave? *The Heritage of Zimbabwe*, a document of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, outlines one reason for this. It states that a national heritage site consists of physical remains left by previous inhabitants and possessing historical significance. The remains may be as old as the beginning of mankind or as modern as yesterday. As if to remind the public, the document continues, ‘these remains are a non renewable resource and once destroyed they will never be replaced.’

The number of visitors in the recent past shows how important the site is to the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe in terms of revenue collection and to the tourism sector of the Zimbabwe economy. Today the site is as much affected by visitor drought as any other site, with the total number of visitors to Rhodes’ grave dropping from around 154,000 in 1999 to 27,000 in 2001. However, compared to other sites, such as the World Heritage Site of Khami Ruins, World’s View still has a large number of visitors. The number of visitors from schools, nearly 30,000 in 1999, shows that the site has an

important role in educating the youth about the history of Zimbabwe.

The call by some sectors of society for Rhodes' remains to be removed from the Matopos has stimulated strong debate. Those who call for the removal of his remains have been described as angry and destructive nationalists, with no concern for economic development. Those who support the retention of the grave have been accused of being colonial stooges, with no appreciation of African nationalism, respecting white values, but rejecting African traditional norms and cultural values.

Some people have openly advocated that the remains be removed, declaring the grave to be an 'invasion', and that, should the British fail to collect these remains, the bones should be thrown into the mighty Zambezi River. They argue that the grave is an insult to the gods of the people of Zimbabwe and to Mzilikazi, the king of the Ndebele, since the site was a place of pilgrimage and celebration of victory over the Ndebele.

According to Fergus Kasoka, of the Anti-British Group in Bulawayo, Rhodes' grave could easily be relocated to a burial site at Luveve cemetery, for the spirit of Rhodes can not be allowed to continue 'haunting us at every turn'.

Two British tourists, in a letter to the *The Chronicle* entitled 'Cecil Rhodes no hero', stated that a television series in Britain showed him in a very poor light, and recognized all the wrongs he had perpetrated. The writers went on to compare visiting Rhodes' grave to visiting a concentration camp in Poland or Germany with the intent of 'honouring the Nazis.' The letter concludes with, 'Tell the truth about the past.'

Commenting on the issue, President Mugabe sarcastically said, about Rhodes' bones, "I have said in the past that Rhodes should pay taxes and our people don't need to promote tourism towards the grave" and former Zambian President Chiluba declared that Rhodes' bones "do not harm us".

Favouring the development of Rhodes' grave, the former Member of Parliament for Matobo said, "Some people are busy talking about stupid actions like exhuming Rhodes' remains and throwing them into a river. We in Matobo do not mind having the grave there, but we

want to get something from its presence in our midst.” He went on to state that history could not be rewritten by advocating radical action, and simply emphasized that the grave is part of the history of the country and, in particular, Matobo District. The chairman of the Rhodes Matopos Estate Committee and Town Clerk for the City of Bulawayo also argued against the campaign to remove the remains of Rhodes, saying that Rhodes was part of the history of Zimbabwe as much as the Mambos, Mzilikazi, Lobengula and others. The former detainee and freedom fighter further ruffled feathers by equating those that are campaigning for the removal of Rhodes’ bones to the former savage regime in Afghanistan, “It is the Taliban who destroy history and I am not a Taliban. After Rhodes’ grave, who’s next?” he asked.

A survey by *The Chronicle* concluded that the majority of the local population in Matabeleland wanted Rhodes’ grave to remain at the site. Mrs. Elifa Ndlovu and Mloyiswa Moyo agreed that the remains did not bother them as they had lived all their lives in peace with the remains. An interesting view was later given by Gogo Ngcathu, a custodian at Njelele Shrine, who warned that those that would tamper with the remains of Rhodes should shoulder the consequences of his avenging spirit should it find the remains exhumed. It is a traditional belief that a dead man’s spirit lingers around until the relatives of the dead person pacify it through ‘umbuyiso’, hence those that tamper with the grave could attract the wrath of the dead man’s spirits. The behaviour expected around shrines in general should also be considered. Sitwanyana Ncube, a rival custodian to Gogo Ngcathu, warned of catastrophic consequences over disrespect to the Njelele Shrine. A spirit medium, resident in Bulawayo’s Entumbane suburb, who had predicted Cyclone Eline, was summoned in 1998 before Matobo District elders for conducting rituals at the Njelele Shrine and was fined three head of cattle as a disciplinary measure.

It can be seen that Rhodes’ grave has economic, political and religious significance, with both positive and negative aspects. It can easily be understood why Mr. S.J.Muringaniza, a National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe archaeologist called the gravesite a “Heritage of hurts”. On his visit to the site Dr B.S. Dlamini, Prime

Minister of Swaziland, is quoted as having said, "It's a beautiful, scenic place and it is encouraging to note that you people have so much respect that you have even left intact the painful aspects of it." As Robert Mugabe has said, "Yes! We might not have agreed with him but he is a historical figure".

A way forward is to develop an interpretive centre at the site. So how can this be done? First and foremost there is a need for balance. The Ndebele once felt challenged by the annual pilgrimage to Rhodes' grave, which was perceived as "whites worshipping their ancestors in the form of Rhodes", and felt that they should take up the challenge and build an equivalent site of honour at Mzilikazi's tomb at Entumbane. Any interpretive centre must respect these feelings and consider all the significant figures involved in the history of the Matopo Hills. The agreement made between Rhodes and the Ndebele chiefs would also figure. Rhodes stated to the chiefs that "he wished them to take care of his grave and remain in the vicinity." The Ndebele chiefs honoured their side of the bargain by allowing Rhodes to be buried in the Matopos, despite his efforts to destroy the Ndebele state and his disastrous attempt to capture and humiliate King Lobengula. This attempt led to the total annihilation of the Shangani patrol, whose remains are also buried at the Rhodes gravesite. The centre could also consider the impact of Rhodes on the subsequent history of Zimbabwe, for example on the distribution of land. The period leading to the arrival of whites in Zimbabwe and the later destruction of the Ndebele state merits further study. All of these issues could be covered in a newly developed interpretive centre near Rhodes' grave, where both locals and visitors to the country could be involved in the reconstruction of the history of Zimbabwe and the Matopo Hills in particular.

On a Day Like This

Bhekilizwe Dube

On a day like this, it will be a full house at home. She is saying. This lady I hardly know. Skha, this lady I just met. My friend Sthwa, he introduced us. He conveniently sneaked away leaving us two together. Gone to meet Skha's friend who is driving him to his knees and tummy, prostrate. May the blessings of the Goddess forever keep him young and loving.

Leaving us two. We are right in the middle of the pavement, two boulders in a raging river, stubborn, daring, standing out, the flow all around - in the middle of the pavement, talking, stealing looks, glances, staring, still – on a day like this. Strange, on a bad tempered cold day like this, talking to this lady, mindless of the torrent, in the middle of the stream – we are happy.

I'm warm, and light, and shy. Scared. Still, it don't matter. Nothing does.

Her voice, flows.

Her talk – the stream.

She sounds intelligent, this beautiful lady with full lips – I can't quit hoping.

Crazy.

Her pleading eyes, they hold mine, giving me this look, this strange look which keeps hope burning.

She jerks her head, checking dreadlocks.

Her lashes, face, nose, beautiful.

I can't tear my eyes from those lips.

Her eyes seek mine, fleetingly.

They meet mine.

I blush, look away.

Blue jeans, green jacket, black, reaching out shoes, dreadlocked.

This lady I just met.

A full house. She is saying.

Her deep black eyes are wistful, longing.

I smile.

A full house. On a day like this.

Mother, grumbling, with an indulgent glint in her eyes, about a tiring day at pre-school, knocking some education and sense into the kids' heads.

Her smile is wry, she has a look which suggests that she ought to know better than to devote her time to so dubious a task.

Mama, her talk-drizzle, gentle, constant. Frowning, scolding, smiling, exasperated, angry, resigned, laughing.

Mama, roasting groundnuts, salting them, the pan steaming as she adds a bit of water. This to make the salt melt and stick fast to the nuts, giving them a dusty, salty look. My mouth waters, I love groundnuts.

Father is reading a newspaper, occasionally grunting, chuckling, frowning, snorting. A host of sounds. His newspaper sounds. They never vary.

Toothpick in mouth, one hand holding the newspaper at the centre, he is lost.

His knees protrude from the warmth of the sofa, supporting the newspaper.

His head is slightly inclined, he looks like one straining to catch a distant sound.

The toothpick dips, probes, worries offensive meaty remains.

Thahalo, my sister's son, suckles, all gurgle and balled fists, tiny balled fists. His delicate forehead sweats, the beads of sweat like dew on a young melon, tiny sweet melon growing in the fields, beady fresh.

He is all tug and tremble, a desperate calf after the milking, tugging for every drop of milk the nasty humans want for themselves.

My sister coos softly, her warm eyes affectionate. Gently, she kneads

his toes. Her eyes have a self-satisfied maternal look. A young, proud mother of one. He is a peaceful child, I am glad. Kids can keep people awake when they fuss, especially the bad tempered wailers, who spurt out of their tiny bodies piercing wails, which make everyone edgy and foul tempered. We all adore him. He may grow to be a temperate, placid sage. I hope he does. He already looks wise and pleasant. I love to kiss his soft baby skin, when father is not around. He disapproves of sentimentality in a man. Some parents never cease to see a grown person as a child to be corrected and censured. My father is one of these.

Buhle has a halo about her, an air of happy motherhood. Her eyes fairly glow. I have seen these same eyes flare and spark. I remember once, when we were young, in a fit of naughtiness, I took a big fat millipede, shiny black-glowing, jet in fact, all curled up in defiant protest, and put it into her plate of sadza and beef stew. Her lunch. She passionately loves beef stew. Mama affectionately called her, when we were young, her wild savage who ate flesh raw. She loved to be referred to in such bold and wild terms.

She had no beef that afternoon. And I ran far that afternoon. Very far.

When the deed was done, I hovered around the kitchen, waiting for her to have her beef stew. I did not wait long. She was hungry and full of anticipation when she seized the plate, removing the one on top, covering the meal.

I was expecting the piercing scream. I was expecting the anger, the choking sobs. I was not expecting the plate and its contents to hit me hard. Neither was I expecting yet another plate, and another, and yet another to fall thick and fast upon me after the terror and sobs. I ran.

She croons an ancient Zulu lullaby, *thula sana, thula sana* – quiet child. Baby Thahalo, in the hammock of her arms, yawns, sighs contentedly. Babies sigh too.

Thula sana, a lullaby which survived the blood, spears, war drums, disease and death of war.

Thula sana survived the arduous trek of the Ndebele from Zululand to found Matabeleland and the numerous brutal and fierce skirmishes with Shaka's ferocious impis.

Thula sana today is alive in Bulawayo. The warriors are long dead. Their spawn survives them.

Song is the soul's longing for harmony, for beauty, for the tranquil-completeness.

Thula sana, a lullaby of triumph, mocking Shaka's repelled warriors.

Thula sana, dropping gently into baby's ears like shy raindrops. Tender as dew at dawn. Light, soothing.

Thula sana, soothing, on a day like this, in Nkulumane, Bulawayo.

The aroma of groundnuts is overpowering, Mama looks up, then down into the pan. She smiles.

When she smiles like that, I want to hug her. She makes me feel like a child all over again. I grin. Something in my grin must be boyish. She last smiled at me like this when I was young and needed to be reassured that her love kept me safe from everything.

I love it when she smiles like that.

My heart swells, it burns. I am grinning like a buffoon. Something is stuck in my throat. Hot. Something lumpish. Choking.

I simply love this woman.

I almost drop a plate. I don't know what's wrong with my hands. Whenever I hold a plate, it protests, threatening to fall down. I lunge desperately and hold it fast, before it falls. Mama looks up, sharply. She frowns.

"Nqo!"

Her voice is sharp, disapproving.

"What do you want?" She brandishes a spoon threateningly.

"Nothing ma, I was just missing you, I want t..."

"When you miss me you hold plates?" The spoon is threatening.

"Suka! You want to steal the nuts!" The last spoken triumphantly, knowingly, warningly.

I grin sheepishly. "Uh..."

"Go. What a fine man! The puppies are whining for their food. You

never forget to eat, do you? Feed the puppies, they want food too. Go.” She is volubly dismissive.

I leave. She has a gentle glint in her eyes that I do not want to see flaring. A smile flickers across her lips. I whistle as I leave, full of keen anticipation. The nuts are cooling on a platter.

The puppies yelp and whine when they see their food. They growl deep in their throats and excitedly paw the fence. They must be hungry and their food does smell good. I’m glad people don’t have to whine and grovel for food like this. The food is cold. We never give them hot food, it is bad for their teeth. It weakens them. The teeth must be strong, they must rend thick skin and crunch into bone during a hunt.

A hunt. In the rural home, in the evening, when the sun has lost its passion. When the herd-boys’ whistles pierce the evening calm, their whips strident, urging the cattle home. The dust, arrogantly, lazily rising, drifting in clouds, disdainful of all below.

We whistle, sharply, three quick volleys. Calling the dogs. They come. Their tongues hang down. The bellies heave. They pant and whine. They dash away, dash back, growling, rumpling, impatient, the hunt is on, they know. We go. They streak away, ears erect, tails stiff, thrust up tautly. Snouts down, they dash from one thicket to another, quivering all over with impatience, seeking trail.

I leave the puppies feeding, growling in their greed to eat all, alone, snapping threateningly at each other. Greedy things, they never want to share.

Tomorrow, father will take them to our rural home. The high density suburb is no place for a proper dog. A dog needs to range, it needs space, the bush.

White people’s dogs are a shame, they are sissies who have their hair brushed. I saw one once with make-up.

The lemon tea is hot and sour sweet. The groundnuts salty, crunchy. It is good.

She's giving me a funny look. Surprise?
There's something else in her eyes. I don't know what it is.
I just know that it is not something to fear. I am content.
It is warm. Safe. It's got the promise of love. Of happiness.
In the eyes. It's in the eyes.
"You're strange. What made you freeze up on me like that? You seemed so very distant, you know, a warm sort of distance. I liked it."
She looks at me contemplatively.
"Why were you so still?"
She is intrigued.

In the middle of the pavement, on this cold day.
She waits. She too is still.

I smile.

"You said it would be a full house, on a day like this, at your home.
Mine too."

We are both of us quiet for a while, thoughtful. The kind of silence you want to last forever, comfortable. Connecting.
A beautiful moment.

We hardly know each other. It does not matter, for, in this moment, surely, we do.
She smiles, I do too.
She is holding something back.
Laughter.
It bursts out.
Suddenly, she is laughing, hard.
It's infectious, I am laughing too.
Inexplicably, we are laughing, strangers no more.
My sides hurt, hers must be hurting too.
We are laughing, in the middle of the pavement. Laughing so hard it hurts.
So good, on a day like this. Nothing matters, not much.

Grandfather's Birthday

Shirley Tarr

Grandfather had dreamed last night; dreamed of death, and awakened slowly, with a deep sense of peace. This morning he squatted where the sun slanted beneath the thatch and warmed the dimpled mud of his hut. He sat here every morning, for he felt cold almost all of the time now, and there was no finer spot to toast old bones from both sides. And summer was dying – his nostrils flared – beneath autumn's brittle warmth he could smell the stealth of winter. Soon the winds would swing, sweeping chill and ruthless from the south; who would have imagined he would ever fret about the weather? Long ago he would have laughed down winter's throat.

Long ago his blood had surged and pounded, fierce with heat, but those fires were a far memory now – another life! He chuckled. Surely the gods must smile to watch blustering youth dwindle down to this. Only his mind and eyes remained keen, embers in the ashes of age. Well, let gods laugh. Let his bones ache under their weight of years; life had been good. He would not change one day nor hour.

I am the most fortunate of men, he exulted silently, watching his cattle lumber from their night kraal. Plodding hooves churned the dust so long that it hung, red and listless on the air. Further beyond, golden grasslands unfurled, and barefoot girls swayed homewards in twos and threes, water tins balanced on their heads. Their laughter shimmered in the hollows like the chatter of sparrows at dawn. This is my home, Grandfather reflected. I was born here and I will die here, to lie under this very soil. He trailed his fingers through the dust and grinned toothlessly, treasuring the fitness of this thought.

Ah, if only his sons and daughters lived here, where they had been born, his content would have been complete, but they had scattered to the city years before. Now, when they did visit, they liked to deride the drowsy pulse of village life, and to recount the delights of the city. How their tongues glittered, painting the seething city's wonders – would they never cease pressing him to join them there? Grandfather laughed, shoulders quaking. He had been secretly horrified, but never

tempted by their tales. They called him stubborn – the word stupid hovered unspoken – and though he knew himself simple, was he not wise to stay where he was happy? What did they know? Here he was called ‘Old One’, and his years demanded respect. He had been to the city, he knew that age earned only impudence and intolerance there.

Well, today they would come to his world. They would endure the sunshine and bird-song to spend a few hours gathered about him, for did not his identity card show plainly that it was his birthday? The old man cackled, tickled as always by this absurdity. Birth certificates had been unheard of when he’d come howling to this world, in truth he had no idea when he’d been born.

He closed his eyes, the better to relish memory. He saw again the government buildings – twin giants, grey and burrowed with dismal passageways; the stony-faced official with his bewildered insistence on a date of birth for his records. Identity cards are obligatory, that clerk had announced repeatedly and senselessly. Grandfather had lost his temper with the man, and demanded indignantly whether his life might puff suddenly out without this wondrous card. But the official had only blinked and looked more deeply mystified, and at last Grandfather had guffawed, taken pity on the fool and hazarded a guess. Thus had a phantom date become a lasting truth, engraved boldly upon metal. And it had served him nothing, his birthday, except to ensure that his family paid him a visit, once each year.

He waited through the morning, shifting in inches with the sunshine. He had hoped his family would come before the thorn tree’s shade cleared the hut’s thatch, but it was midday when they arrived. Their cars thundered into his yard, billowing the dust and scattering his chickens into screeching hiccups of fright. There would be no eggs tomorrow, yet the sight of his whole family, his own flesh and blood, flushed him through with pride. Car doors slammed, greetings were shouted and arms thrown wide. They were dressed in city clothes, so elegant, so new that his neighbours stared openly over thorn fences. Eeeehhh, this visit would give cause for many satisfying weeks of gossip. The old man tottered to meet his people and was embraced, slapped on the back and engulfed in such a confusion of smells – perfume, aftershave, chewing gum – that his nostrils quivered

indignantly. The air sparkled with laughter and smiles. How was he? So gay they were, they left no pause for him to answer, while their eyes remained shuttered behind silvered sunglasses.

The littlest one – the single, perfect great grandchild – toddled over to Grandfather, a store-wrapped parcel cradled in his palms. Ah, he was grown so much stronger in a year! The old man put the present aside and joyfully raised the boy onto his knee. But the child, uncertain of this ancient with the sunken mouth, wriggled to escape, and his chubby lips quivered, threatening tears. Grandfather knew then that he should have worn those cursed dentures – inventions of pure torture – but he'd not laid eyes on them for months, and nursed secret hopes that this time they were truly lost. He held the child an instant longer, searching the infant eyes for a glimpse of the spirit, and then released him.

The boy ran off at once, drawn to a cluster of youngsters grubbing in the dirt outside the bottle store. These children played there every day, unattended, sifting through the sad litter, their eyes emptied by the music which boomed from within and their mouths smeared with sugar-drink, and it made the old man feel oddly hollow to watch great grandson amongst them. It made him uneasy, as if the littlest one had strayed into some shadow of danger, and he too old to perceive that danger clearly.

He shrugged, casting off unaccustomed gloom, and turned away to find Grandmother offering her traditional beer to everyone. They would refuse it of course. The brew was her own – ripe and rich and renowned throughout the village – and she made it proudly for them every year; and every year they brought their own beer, bottled and in clinking cratefuls. When she offered him a drink the old man paid her tribute with his eyes. Then he dipped his calabash to the brim, drank greedily and smacked his lips as loudly as he could.

Carrying a clear lager, Eldest Son approached and took Grandfather by the elbow. He steered the old man into the shade and told him of a great hole in the sky. The sun, he explained earnestly, had become dangerous and would burn their skins – surely Grandfather knew this? The old man halted and stood silent, inwardly wrestling to make sense of this new mystery. The sun? His enemy?

Why was his skin black, if not to capture all of the day's gold, and from where should an old man take warmth if not from the sun's fire. He peered upwards mistrustfully – the sun did not seem changed to him; but he didn't like to question further, remembering the quarrel over computers which had broken like thunder over this very day last year. He disengaged his arm and moved off to inspect the cook-fire. The coals must be just right or the meat will burn, he murmured with a smile. Surely Eldest Son knew this?

When the fire had smouldered to coals, Second Son went to the butchery which sagged wearily against the bottle store, and returned with meat for the celebration. The flesh was dark from too many days' hanging, and Grandfather surreptitiously examined his portion for fly eggs before laying it over the coals. Then he crouched by the fireside. Swaying on his haunches in the wreathing smoke, he recounted the times he had hunted for meat – proudly, in skill, and with no less love for the prey than for the babes waiting to be fed in the home hut. Everyone listened politely, but their eyes spoke that this was as great a mystery to them as the hole in the sky was to him. They claimed that the butchery was hygienic, when he knew for himself that the place was thick with the stench of days-old death. Their voices rose in annoyance: just consider what this meat had cost them! Grandfather's voice rose too: could not a man's own flesh and blood share his joyful memories? He sat in the sudden hush, gumming his savourless meat as the fire winked out; its ashes puffed and eddied, grey as misunderstanding on the wind.

The younger men, his unmarried grandsons, carried their food from the fireside and ate it against the cars. They turned on the car radios and slouched in hip-hop disdain, snapping their fingers and eyeing the village girls with sultry arrogance. Every so often they turned the radios a little louder. Grandfather had taken Eldest Daughter to one side, wanting some time with her, but now he had to watch her lips carefully in an effort to catch her words.

She whispered of Sisi, Second Granddaughter, who had died in a distant country, alone and far from home. This disease, Eldest Daughter murmured, averting her eyes uncomfortably, and Grandfather recoiled in horror. He knew about AIDS; knew that it

brought certain and untimely death, for its shadow had fallen even here, in his village. No drum, no spell had been able to drive it away, and the elders warned that to speak its name aloud would call down its dark witchery. He shuddered and longed for distant times; times when his tribe's enemies had been few, and had declared themselves openly, with honour. Now the enemies of his people were many and unseen, like this monster which prowled through the blood and the seed.

Hearing Sisi's name, Grandfather's people drew closer. She is in heaven now, someone assured him solemnly, but the old man said nothing. He had heard about heaven, and in his heart he cursed the Christian God for His insubstantial and obscure promises. The old gods now, the ancestors, these took an unmistakable part in the life of day-to-day. They were like neighbours – sometimes angry, mostly friendly, always there. If this heaven is so wonderful, the old man wondered, why did even Christians fear the death which carried them there? His people had embraced an unseen god to shield them from unseen enemies, and did they now carry lighter burdens than he? Rather they were like children, lost in a cruel land. The children find a rock; they huddle in its shelter and cry out to it as father. Yet the rock speaks no comfort, nor knows them by name. To think of this frustrated him. Could it be that those sunglasses veiled the dance of the great all from their eyes? Perhaps, in their new world, there was a measure of comfort in blindness?

Discomfited by the old man's pensive silence, Fourth Grandson swaggered over and told him proudly of his new job. Yes, the youngster agreed, it was true that the work took him far from home, but the money was good, and soon he would be able to afford the satellite television for which his lovely wife yearned. Grandfather looked at the girl, recognising the mantle of silken content which hangs well only on a woman with many lovers. Her eyes met his brazenly, but she could not hold his gaze. The old man considered then that the television might be a good thing; Fourth Grandson could stare into its brightness and pretend not to feel the pain of a wife's deceptions.

What about Great Grandson? he asked aloud, glancing towards the bottle store. Surely you will miss your boy? Fourth Grandson

shrugged easily. He could see his firstborn every month. More importantly, the child would be well clothed and properly educated. Grandfather turned wordlessly to watch the littlest one at play. A son should have a father more than once a month, he thought, letting the chatter around him fade as he spun down and back through time. He remembered his own father; the man who had walked beside him, guiding each step from boyhood through youth and beyond; the one who had led him into manhood on sure feet, simply by being a man himself. Was this not the greatest gift of father to son? What would become of Great Grandson? Grandfather shivered, remembering the young men of the city – young men with old eyes and smiles as cold as switchblades.

Why so sad? Fourth Grandson cried, and there arose a gentle babble of concern. You should be smiling! This is your birthday ... be happy with us. So Grandfather rose, slapped his thighs and began shuffling his feet. From her chair Grandmother began singing softly, clapping a well-loved rhythm. Dance with me, the old man beckoned them, for he knew that the dance will tatter sadness like cloud on the wind. But their eyes glazed over, and some hung their heads in uneasy shame. The old man understood then that they had learned too well of the sins of the flesh, and grown deaf to the body's jubilant call. His feet faltered, then stopped.

He turned to the westering sun and felt a fierce yearning for his own sunset. This new Africa – his own family! It seemed he spun through a dream where everything receded from him with dizzying speed. Oh, he would be glad to go and it would not be long; with every day that passed he sensed the ties fraying, the bonds loosening until all that anchored him here was mist and memory.

At last they said, we must be getting back. Such a nice day. We hate to leave ... so far to go ... it's almost dark. Grandfather watched them pack the cars, sensing their relief beneath this sudden urgency. Like hunters scenting the game trail, his loved ones panted for the city. What were they running from? What hurrying to? The ribbons of twisting light, the noises slamming off concrete – had it taken that little to lure them from their richer heritage?

They left in clouds of diesel fume and dust. Grandfather stood on

the road waving, a wizened figure shrinking in their rear view mirrors. Then they were gone.

He went back to his hut to find Grandmother bustling happily. He sat for a while, watching her neaten her nest and letting her womanly prattle soothe him. Then he spoke his thoughts quietly to her. Why can I not talk to them any more? Truly talk, of deep things? Grandmother's eyes twinkled like a girl's. Open your present, she chortled. Perhaps it might solve your problem.

Grandfather started guiltily – he should have opened the gift in their presence – and fished the package from his pocket. It lay on his palm, the wrapping as tiredly wrinkled as he. He opened it, stared at the cell phone nestled in gold paper, and burst into laughter. See? Grandmother cried, quivering with glee. I have a list of their numbers. Now you can talk to them anytime! She hurried to take the treasure from him, and laid it reverently on a shelf of mud, and all the while she wondered why the old fool laughed and laughed.

Still chuckling, Grandfather helped himself to a last calabash of beer and went outside to watch the sun go down. Across his village the evening fires were being lit one by one, a dance of flame and shadow in the dusk, and a cow-bell tolled sleepily from the valley. The old man closed his eyes and simply breathed: a tang of wood smoke, a spicy waft of stew – the scents of life through all the air. When he looked again, all that remained of his birthday lay bleeding along the horizon, and the night wind was turning chill.

Ah, but this beer still tasted fine and the hearth-fire still beckoned, these were simple pleasures in a world grown hard and cold. And he dreamed last night, of death, who befriends each man at last, sweet watcher at the farthest door. Soon now that door would open for him, and what wonders might lie beyond? Surely it opened onto summer plains vaster than heaven; surely he would meet his father, and drum the night into dawn. Surely there would be great dancing.

Bhalagwe

For those who died, February to May 1984

Shari Eppel

I

Although it's October and there's yet no rain
last summer's growth stands high across this plain.
As far as eye can see and ear can hear, grass waves,
bells clonk, goats stroll and cattle graze.

It's the wrong place, it almost seems. There's a
distant crumbling gingerbread facade that pulls
me in: slices of stale concrete come away.
The roof is gone: so are the wicked ones

although – it's more a feeling than a sound -
something tautens and the hills suppress a sigh.
The air greys overhead and there's a sense of
someone's shadow clinging tightly to the sky.

And now the grass reveals what's on the ground -
those slivers of ribcage rooms, their long
grey curves haphazardly collapsed around
rows of granite blocks like vertebrae

strewn clear across this valley. More than
a score remain: asbestos corsets designed
each to stifle more than a hundred human
souls, in that too-recent "once upon a time".

Right here – each darkness found them squeezed,
nose to neck and head to toe, too close to groan
or weep too loud, too scared to move and bring
the guards' fresh wrath. And with each dawn -

right here - some wouldn't rise to face another day of beatings and despair: those lucky ones, perhaps, who'd finally let go, slipping, disintegrating with the first rays of the sun.

The arching torsos of this score or more of holding rooms lay close and prone until, it seems, a massive boot descended from above and smashed them flat against the hill.

It's here all right - the place they once called "hell on earth". Bemused, I'm gazing south. Like teeth half splintered in a jaw once pummelled by a giant fist, shards make a ragged mouth

across the bald head of Bhalagwe hill itself. And north, the cruel, stark shell of something worse: the hospital to treat the men who'd strained themselves by beating others hard, and yes the morgue, to store those others beaten dead, to stack them ready for the quick slither down a shaft and then the obliterating blast. We stumble west: on Zamanyone's overgrown

slopes, well hid from sight, we find those pits whose shape one cannot really doubt. Not all went down the mine: some ended here. Straight-sided, just longer than a man and half as tall,

they make untidy rows. The earth-piles lined along their rims point to the casual raising of these dead by their murderers, who left, only half-caring, such evidence behind.

And to the east, a single ZIPRA holding cell:
an arm-span wide and not two metres high.
In here the shackled men were crowded
chest to crouching chest, waiting to die.

II

Bhalagwe, beautiful valley, perfect picnic site.
The place stays with me, in my dreams at night.
Grasses bend, cattle doze in curving rays of sun:
then plague descends - the red locusts have come.

At night I see slender fingers snapped
by those in boots and red berets
who wait for thousands to grow, not fat -
no fairytale cookie land is this -

but thin enough to crumble under hand.
Bhalagwe, beautiful mountain, sunlit space:
how many spirits mourn and tiptoe
through the shadowed valleys of this place?

Mtagati Mkulu

Derek Huggins

The camp was on the bank overlooking the river. A tent was stretched between two stout poles and suspended with canvas loops from a cross-member, and pinned out at the edges with wooden pegs. Outside, there was a fireplace, a canvas chair and a wooden table. A horse was picketed nearby under an acacia tree.

Greg Stanyon rose at first light while it was still cool and pulled on his britches. Sitting on the edge of the stretcher-bed, he knocked his boots on the ground and finding them without scorpion or spider, put them on and laced them up. He clipped on his brown leather leggings at ankle and knee and buckled them. Going outside he saw the sun appear over the horizon and the golden light spread across the veldt. He tended the fire, gently blowing away the ashes, and dropped grass on the embers until they ignited, and stoked it with twigs. Drawing water from a five-gallon drum, he filled the kettle and put it on the fire. He poured off more water into a canvas basin and washed, rinsing water through his hair and let it run down over his chest and back. Shaving with the aid of a small square mirror he felt his skin become tight and smooth as it dried. Going inside his tent he put on a grey, starched shirt and a leather belt and brace. He returned to the fire and made coffee in a tin mug, pouring in condensed milk and two spoons of sugar. He squatted by the fire and sipped the scalding liquid until it was finished. Then, going to his horse and opening his hand, he let it lick off the sugar until his fingers were no longer sticky. He groomed the horse and picked the dung from its hooves. Returning to the tent he took an armful of blanket, and the saddle and bridle, and carried them to the horse. After introducing the bit, and securing the bridle, he checked that the blanket was free of grass and thorns, folded and quartered it carefully and slung it over the horse's back, quickly followed by the saddle; pulled up the surcingle gently, put the stirrups over the saddle and walked the horse to the pool in the river and let it drink before tethering it under the tree.

Making another cup of coffee, Stanyon drank it slowly, then

kicked dirt over the embers of the fire. In the tent, he straightened his bedding and looked for mosquitoes trapped inside the net, and squashed them. He gathered and folded the net and tied it in a big knot, and, looking around the tent, was satisfied. He walked to his horse, tightened the straps, dropped the stirrups and mounted. The horse bucked several times before it settled into a canter across the veldt and on to the dirt road which crossed the settlers' farms. The gracious white-washed houses, with their big cool verandahs and green or red painted corrugated roofs, stood on the hillsides where they received the breeze along the valley. Before he had gone far, a young man came running towards him, and signalled him to stop.

"Please come to Mhlanga's Kraal near Sun Up mine. A momba has fallen down the well," he gasped. Stanyon rode for Mhlanga's Kraal.

It was a deep well. It had been sunk many years before by the prospector Johannes Van Vuuren, who had become bad tempered when he had to blast more than fifty yards through the rock to reach the water. Afterwards, when his trenches no longer revealed promising samples, he had left his claim and gone in search of gold elsewhere. Now, the wooden windlass, stark against the flat expanse of the veldt, leant off the vertical. A collection of pole and dagga huts with smoke-steeped thatched roofs stood nearby. Dogs were bellied down in the shade of baked mud walls. Frequently, they would start up on their front legs and lunge around, lips curled and teeth exposed, to snap at the flies or nuzzle at mange sores. Under a tree, near Van Vuuren's old shack, nearly naked children squirmed irritably around the women who sat, legs straight out and barefoot, on the ground. They looked into the landscape towards the well through squinting eyes. Sunlight pulsed into the settlement, bouncing off the shell of a derelict Chevrolet truck and beating into the earth and the people. They sat and watched and waited for something to happen out in the haze at the edge of the fields of scorched maize seedlings. Clay pots stood empty by their sides but nobody attempted to draw water.

The men formed a semi-circle near the lip of the well. They were crouched on their heels, khaki clothes clinging to perspiring bodies.

They murmured quietly amongst themselves. Now and then one would shake his head, the others looking at the ground or across the lands to the horizon. The word mtagati was uttered and passed among them. Furtive and accusing looks were cast at Mhlanga, an old man who sat off to one side of the group.

“It was bad,” mused old Mhlanga. There had been three years of drought and they were long into another. He scanned the sky again but there was no sign of cloud. The grain bins were empty and the crops were failing again. They had planted with the first showers but the clouds had gone soon after the first rains, and not returned. Mhlanga sighed, and wondered what they had done to anger the spirits so much. The river, five miles away, was dry. The stream beds that fed it were dry gulleys in the earth. Even the vlei was cracked and dry and devoid of grass for the cattle and for the thatch. They had always been fortunate to have the well. Now, the women would have to walk miles to find water. But he had done as much he could. He had sent his wife and daughters to dig in the river bed and he had sent a runner, Ruka’s son, to seek help from the white ipholisa who sometimes camped on the settlers’ farms, downstream on the river, where the odd pool could still be found. He did not want to think what would happen if the white policeman was not there. More difficult times would follow.

A woman approached, walking slowly across the lands. Mhlanga knew her. She came from the next kraal line three miles away. A water pot was balanced delicately on her head, and on her back a child was slung in a towel which was wrapped around her waist and knotted at her bosom. He watched her as she eyed the men and stopped at a respectful distance. She reached up to remove the pot from her head and placed it on the ground carefully, even though it was empty. Calling a high pitched greeting, she sat down on the ground and turned her legs under her. Reaching back, she swung the child around into her lap in a careless movement, exposing a breast, and offered it to the child. Whimpers were stifled. The infant sucked greedily and she pumped the breast with her fingers. Flies were ignored as they swarmed and settled around tender eyes and nostrils that were crusty with mucus. And so the people waited. Their throats became dry, and their lips cracked, and the cattle returning from the veldt, impatient for

water, clustered at the trough near the well.

They were still there under the midday sun when Greg Stanyon checked his lathered horse in the scrub bush on the far side of the lands. He had ridden hard and long, past the flat-topped Muwunga Hills, and through the savannah woodland. His face and forearms were burnt by the sun. He watched for some minutes, then rode at a walk across the fields towards the knot of people gathered at the well.

The old man Mhlanga was the first to see him. ‘Ahiee!’ he exclaimed. He tried to rise but his knees were cramped and he relaxed into the familiar pose again. Stanyon looked down at the group, and then to the woman who was cleaning her child’s nose with her fingers. Wearily, he climbed from the saddle, tied his horse to the windlass and called out a greeting to the people.

“Salibonani.”

“Sikhona,” they replied, almost as one. Stanyon moved stiffly towards them and crouched to face the eldest.

“Yebo, Baba. Linjani?” he said, using the term ‘Father’ to show his respect.

“I am well,” lied the old man.

“Good. If that is so I am pleased for you,” said Stanyon. “And your wives and children? Are they strong too?”

The old man rocked himself from side to side and shifted his feet slightly. He took off his hat and wiped his brow with the underside of the brim. Squinting his eyes against the bright light, he shot a glance at the young white man who had sought him out to speak for them all.

“They are thirsty,” said the old man at last. “The cattle are thirsty. We are all thirsty. The sun is burning us up. Bad luck has come to our village.”

“Why?” asked Stanyon, as he watched the old man go through his pockets for a piece of crumpled newspaper into which he tapped some dusty tobacco. He made a roll between his fingers, pinching off the loose strands, and felt for his matches.

“It is very bad,” said the old man at last. He lit his cigarette. The paper flared and the excess burned back to the tobacco and then went out. The tobacco smouldered. He sucked hard and blew the smoke out slowly.

“Do you not know why?”

“You tell me,” said Stanyon.

“It is the well.”

“Dried up?”

“No. It is a good well. It is very deep. It has never dried in all my years.”

“What then? Poisoned?”

“No. Not poisoned.”

“What then, Mdala?” Stanyon asked patiently.

“The herd boy watered the cattle at dawn. The big bull calf fell down the hole.”

“Ah. And where is the calf now, Mdala?”

The old man winced and looked around the faces of the silent men and then studied the ground at his feet.

“It is still down the hole, Nkosi,” he murmured, now giving Stanyon the title of chief.

“Alive or dead?”

Without waiting for the old man’s reply, Stanyon rose from his crouched position and strode to the edge of the well. Lying down, he cupped his hands around his eyes and stared into the black pit. He remained motionless, permitting his eyes to adjust to the darkness below. The villagers looked on silently. Concentrating, Stanyon discerned a ripple across the surface of the circle far below. He got to his feet and returned to stand in front of the men.

“Who left the well uncovered?”

There was no answer.

“Did you draw water after the calf fell down the hole?”

“No,” said the old man.

“But did you try to draw water?”

“Yes, Nkosi.”

“And why didn’t you?”

“Because of the calf. The bucket would not fill. We think it is still alive.”

“What will happen when the calf drowns?”

“The water will become bad.”

“And who owns the calf?”

“It is I,” said the old man.

“And what have you done about getting it out?” asked Stanyon, his irritation rising. The old man averted his gaze and looked past Stanyon, across the mealie lands and into the blue sky.

“Well, Mdala. What have you done? I think your calf is still alive. It’s been down there all day. How much longer do you think it will be before it drowns? Well? Come on, Mdala. Tell me. What have you done about it?”

“We called you because you will know what to do. You are like our father.”

“Rubbish,” said Stanyon, aware of the irony in the old man’s words. He stood thinking, and kicked a clod of dung in annoyance.

“Didn’t you have a strong man to send down there to pull it out?” Again, there was silence.

“What about you?” asked Stanyon of a well-built man in his twenties. “You can go down the hole.”

“Ah. Ayikhona,” said the man. He jerked himself backwards. Turning away and climbing to his feet, he muttered “There is mtagati mkulu down there.”

“Mtagati,” said Stanyon. “Spirits and werewolves and witches riding hyenas. I don’t believe in that hocus-pocus.” He turned back to the old man.

“Where is the herd boy? He can go down the hole.”

“I do not know.” Mhlanga shrugged his shoulders. “He is somewhere in the forest,” and he gestured vaguely with a sweep of his arm towards the bush. “He ran away. I wanted to beat him with the sjambok. I am too old to run. But I will thrash him when he comes back.”

“That’s better,” said Stanyon. “You do that.”

Inside the well the air was stale and damp. Stanyon, naked except for his under-pants, stood in the bucket which was suspended over the pit. Two men at the windlass gripped the handle. Stanyon held on to the hawser, and the bucket revolved gently and clanged against the jagged rock wall, as he was lowered down. Under his feet, coiled in the bottom of the bucket, was a length of chain, one end of which was

hooked to the hawser. Looking up, Stanyon watched the old man's head, protruding into the circle of light at the lip of the well, grow smaller.

"Slowly, Mdala," he shouted. "Tell them to go slowly. Slowly, for Christ's sake. Slowly."

Soon Stanyon became aware of laboured breathing and saw that he was nearing the water.

"Hamba kahle," he shouted up to the old man. "Slowly, Mdala. Whoa. Stop."

Forty and more yards down the well, he was suspended just above the surface of the water. Below him, in the confined space, the calf was treading water, its lower jaw thrust against the wall to keep its nostrils clear, eyes rolled back, white and gleaming. Stanyon shivered but he was not cold. Reaching down into the bucket he took the chain and played it out with a rattle over the side. The calf surged with fear.

"Steady, ithole," he said quietly. "Steady. Easy now, easy."

Cautiously, Stanyon pulled himself out of the bucket, and lowered himself down the chain into the water alongside the calf. The bucket banged against the rock wall. The calf, now in panic, renewed its struggle. Panting hard with the exertion, Stanyon retrieved, hand over hand, the chain that hung below him, until he felt the open-ended hook. Struggling against its weight, striving to keep afloat, he closed with the animal, feeling its sodden hair smooth against his skin, and heaved the chain over its back so that it hung down on the other side. The calf thrashed frantically. Stanyon then ducked, the water closing above him, as he reached under the animal's belly, feeling for the chain on the far flank. Finding and grasping it, he pulled it towards him. A hoof gouged sharply across his thigh. He was forced deep down beneath the surface of the water while he and the calf fought to regain their space on the surface and find air. Gasping in the musty air, he took up the slack, and reaching over the animal's back, inserted the hook through a link in the chain. He hung on to the bucket and recovered his breath. The calf quietened. Stanyon pulled himself into the bucket and grabbed the hawser. His thigh was bleeding and a muscle twitched uncontrollably above his knee.

"Baba!" he called. "Baba!" he called again, looking upwards to

where the old man's head still showed against the light.

"Wind now, Mdala. Kahle, kahle." His voice sounded strange to his ears as it echoed hollowly deep in the hole. The bucket moved steadily as the men turned the windlass. Almost immediately Stanyon felt the weight of the calf being taken up on the chain. He looked below him and saw the calf suspended, head uppermost, half out of the water. He shuddered. Its forelegs were forced up into a praying position as the chain bit into the soft flesh around its shoulders and beneath its chest. It was as if it were already on a gibbet.

The ring of light above him became larger. Stanyon looked alternately up and down. The calf still hung at the end of the chain beneath the bucket, which turned, the calf revolving with it. Then Stanyon felt the dry, bricked neck of the well beneath his hand and the villagers pulled him clear. He felt cold and was trembling in the sunlight. Mhlanga was at his side. The women and the children, with their pails and pots, came running across the dirt. They gathered about him, shouting, laughing and ululating and clapping. The women observed his white, lithe body and he was not ashamed. He turned away from them to the well. The two men were still braced against the windlass handle. The bucket was hard against the windlass and the calf was hanging over the hole.

"For God's sake," he shouted. "Get the ithole in before it falls again."

Two men seized the calf by the tail and dragged it clear of the hole and unhooked the chain. The calf lay exhausted on the ground. The skin along its back and flanks was lacerated, exposing red flesh and blue tinged innards. Stanyon walked to his horse, loosed his rifle from its holster and worked the bolt. He turned, and raised it to his shoulder. The mood of the villagers changed. They went silent. He sighted along the barrel, seeking the point between the eyes, thumb releasing the safety catch, finger on the trigger. He took a deep breath and held it in his chest, found the patch of white hair on the calf's head, and took up the pressure on the trigger.

The calf, weak-legged, got to its feet and stood with its head down. Stanyon watched it for a moment and then put up his rifle and ejected the unspent bullet. The old man picked it up, dusted it against

his shirt and handed it back to him.

“I’m not going to shoot the ithole,” said Stanyon. “He wants to live. Look. He’s gaining strength. There are no broken bones. He deserves a chance.”

The old man nodded his head, looking into Stanyon’s face, noting the tan which contrasted with the rest of his body. Stanyon dressed and took his horse to the trough and the old man brought water.

“Tell me, Nkosi,” said the old man. “You saw the mtagati mkulu in the hole?”

“I saw nothing but the calf, Mdala,” said Stanyon. He saw the disappointment in the old man’s face. “I don’t believe in your spirits.”

“But, Nkosi,” whispered the old man, “my father told me that one of the diggers died down there.”

“That may be, Mdala,” said Stanyon. “But I didn’t see him.”

He turned and mounted his horse. The old man handed up his hat to him. He put it on.

“Tend the calf properly, Mdala. You must sew him where he is torn and put tar on the wounds. Come to my camp on the river if you need some.”

He wheeled his horse, touched it with his spurs and rode off.

Two weeks later, Stanyon visited Mhlanga’s kraal. The smell of the rain was fresh in the air and the earth was rich and soft. Water lay in puddles along the track and evaporated in wavering bands of haze. There was a new spirit over the land. The veld had changed miraculously from russets and yellow ochres to fresh greens and blues. The women chanted as they hoed along the furrows between the lines of mealie seedlings. They waved and called greetings to Stanyon as he rode past.

Old Mhanga was sitting outside his hut. He watched Stanyon’s arrival and was glad.

“Salibonani, Baba,” greeted Stanyon.

“Yebo,” replied Mhlanga. “I am well. My wives are strong and so too are my children, except for the youngest. He is still marked from the beating I gave him. He spent two nights in the forest before he came home.”

The old man's mischievous eyes searched the young policeman's face. "The crops are growing quickly with the rains."

"So I see, Mdala. It is good. And your cattle?"

"They are becoming smooth and sleek with the new grass, Nkosi."

He called out to his oldest wife who came from the kitchen hut with a gourd of beer and a bowl of groundnuts. As she approached she knelt and walked on her knees and then set the calabashes in front of Stanyon. She filled a smaller gourd with beer and handed it to him. Stanyon thanked her by clapping his hands together and sipped the thick sour liquid. He then offered it to Mhlanga who drank it off and handed it back to the woman who refilled it.

"And the ithole, Mdala," said Stanyon. "What of him? Does he too gain strength and grow quickly?"

"Ah, Nkosi," said the old man quietly, and with a sigh. "Sometimes there are things about which it is better not to ask."

"Tell me, Mdala. I want to know about the ithole."

"He is dead, Nkosi." replied the old man seeing the hurt in Stanyon's eyes. "He was dead when I went to the kraal yesterday morning. It was the holes in his back."

"Did you stitch him?"

"Of course, Nkosi. But he became rotten inside. Even his hide was worthless." Stanyon said nothing. He thought about the calf standing head down in a corner of the kraal in the heat of the sun, the flies swarming and finding the soft insides through the rents in its hide, laying eggs, and the wriggling white maggots.

"The death of the ithole makes the Nkosi sad?" ventured the old man.

"Yes".

"But you were going to shoot him on the day he came out of the hole. Why are you sad now?"

"I was going to shoot him because he was suffering. Then I thought he would live. Now he is dead. I should have shot him."

"It would have been better, Nkosi. The meat would have been fresh".

"Why didn't you slaughter him? Why did you let him live for so long when he was suffering?"

“Because, Nkosi, I knew you wanted him to live.”

“Yes, I wanted him to live. But when you knew he would not live, you should have killed him.”

“Nkosi, you and I see things differently,” said Mhlanga. “I did not want to lose the calf. But it became sick from its injuries. It died. That is the way of things. Was it not better that you pulled the ithole from the hole so that we would have water, rather than caring so much about the ithole?”

“Yes. I suppose so, Mdala,” replied Stanyon. “That is a better way of seeing it.”

They sat and finished the beer, passing the gourd to one another, each lost in thought. At last Stanyon stood and faced the old man.

“It is time that I should go,” he said.

“Tell me, Nkosi, before you go,” said the old man. “Did you see the mtagati mkulu in the hole?” Stanyon looked at the old man’s lined face with the scraggy white beard and discoloured teeth.

“No. I did not see it, Mdala. But I felt its presence.”

“Then it is true,” said the old man, quickening with interest. “And how is it, Nkosi?”

“I couldn’t see clearly. It was dark down there. Only shapes and shadows.” He paused and chose his words carefully. “But I felt cold hands around my knees and around my waist and it tried to pull me down under the water.”

“Ahiee,” murmured the old man and he shivered slightly. He rocked on his heels.

“And when I struggled to free myself it cut my leg.”

“Ah, Nkosi. You were lucky. It took the ithole even though we pulled it out.”

Stanyon turned away, walked to his horse and climbed into the saddle.

“Bad luck, ithole,” he muttered.

“What did you say, Nkosi?” Stanyon nudged his horse and turned to face the old man. He looked him in the eyes.

“I said, Mdala, it is true. There was a bad spirit in the well. It has gone now. Gone with the ithole.”

Prima Donna

Mosquito opera singer,
my room La Scala, I the
victim, she the femme fatale.

Deon Marcus

The Apple Tree

I wish I were an apple and
Cezanne had painted me, then I'd
be no stranger, but red and gold and green.

Deon Marcus

Tuli

Pete Hutton

We climbed the rolling rocks to reach the fort,
The rolling rubble red and hot.
The children clutched their agates, adults glass
In shards of inky blue and pink
As tongues, and green as peppermint and brown
With memories of foaming ale
Or medicines for moistening fevered lips.
The children held in sticky hands
Their geodes, open eggs with crystal whites,
Or metal, bits of barrel hoop
Bursting a hundred years ago with beer,
Rusted bully beef cans, chunks
Of axle from the tortured wagon wheels
Which dragged men, guns and drink into
This arid land, and Shashe River's sand.
To Tuli, 'place of dust', disease,
To Tuli Fort, where waited wealth – or death.

We scrambled to the grassy crest
To find: no fort. Not even ruined walls
No bugles, men in khaki shorts,
No traders, horses, women trailing skirts.
Just view of empty hills and tough
Mopani trees stunted by thirst, but green,
Alive among the human ghosts.
Oh, and one thing: the flag mast stood there still.
But who would now hoist up a flag
To flutter for the lions and elephants,
The only natives left to awe?

Bright butterflies, we slithered down again
Moved on into the silent scrub
Where even more and richer lay their junk:
The desiccated rubbish of
The pioneers' small town, sun-dried, preserves
As greedy dreams and broken hopes.
The path led off into a deeper bush
Of unseen animals, of scents,
Of herby leaves, of dung, of breath, of cat,
And there the cemetery was:
The loneliest and saddest ever seen.

The graves were messy mounds of rock
And from them laughingly the children plucked
Agates and crystals even more.
Crosses were rusted iron and simply marked
With name and age and date of death.
But one or two had something grim to tell
"Dies of enteric fever", or
The boy who "died aged seven" in this hell,
This mad and futureless frontier.
There was one grave, a marble sepulchre
Pompous and grand Victorian,
By wrought iron railings ringed, deeply engraved
In memory of a soldier's soul
So loved but lost in Tuli's wilderness.
What love, what colonising force
Rolled all this stone and metal from Cape Town!
A monument swallowed in bush
A grave where night hyaenas pad and snarl.
There was one cross of ash-grey wood,
A stocky lump of leadwood carved to last
Not years but centuries of sun
And rare and blessed storming summer rains;
A ribbed and furrowed sculpture formed
Of spirit, nature, art – and something more:

The will to die for white man's sway.

We turned and trudged back riverwards again
Past forge and prison, bakery
And barber's shop, where "Tuli Times" was read
And wagons clattered past and on
The hill the floodlight swept around, an eye
Of power, to fill the blacks with fear.
But no. No more. All gone. All crumbled down
To nought. Baboon's bark and soft breeze.

The Shashe is a custard flow of sand,
Its water seeping underneath
Until the watershed releases all
The rush of muddy rivers which
Pour down to the Limpopo and the sea;
And monkey-leaping forests thick
With odours, figs and birds in high-domed trees
Line Shashe's battered, root-wrapped banks.
From bank to bank our party crept across,
Sombre and slow and tugged by sand,
Some of us glassy-eyed, saddened perhaps
By shades of Ozymandias.
Crossing was long – the river's wide- and storks
On stilts, peering in pools, or cry
Of mournful plovers made us stop and stare.
So, home at last to food and rest.

For home is on this side where man still lives,
Where parrots shriek and slice the sky,
Where squirrels race across the canopy
Of giant Nyala tress, where palms
Thrust up from thickets of potato bush
Whose smell is river Africa,
And where a monitor, a reptile brute,
Goes scuffling in the rushes with

A violence that pricks panic in your heart,
Where louries tumble through the boughs,
Screeching at everyone to “goawaaay!”
And if you leave the river woods,
You step into the dusty hinterland:
The blackened rocks of dolerite
Are burnt loaf ridges in the barren hills.
They crossed the Shashe to these hills
From Tuli Fort, seeking their brave new world.
A paperbark tree’s flaking rind,
Impala skulls lying bleached near midden mounds,
A flock of goats ripping the leaves
Acacias try to tuck behind their thorns.

This valley is a world apart,
A place that I have sucked into my core.
Beside the monster Baobab
I find myself alone and sit to see
The ball of sun roll down towards
It’s crimson end beyond the dusk dark sands.
Hadedda Ibis flap across
The sunset, and the raucous ha-ha mocks
My softly whispered last goodbye
To Shashe, Tuli. Like the pioneer,
I’ll leave, but leaving nothing here.

Contributors

Tawanda Chipato is one of six children. The family home is in Paddonhurst, Bulawayo. He attended Milton School and has spent 12 of his 27 years in Bulawayo. At present he is in the final year of a BSc degree in Computer Science and Statistics at the University of Zimbabwe. His ambition is to write the great African novel.

Mathew Chokuwenga, born in 1974, is from a family of eight children. He comes from Chegutu where he now works as a computer graphic designer. As well as writing, he paints, sculpts and plays music. He won an award for English Literature in the UNDP Artists against Poverty Competition and has exhibited at the Delta and Verandah Galleries.

Spencer Crewe is a third generation Zimbabwean, born in 1946 in Thorngrove. He emerged from Bulawayo Technical College as an Electrical Technician. He has been married for 32 years and has two sons. He lives and works in Botswana, but his heart is in Zimbabwe, where he hopes to return within a couple of years. Besides his family and country, his great passions are reading and sitting on the bank of a Zimbabwe river praying to God for a big fish on the end of his lure.

Bhekilizwe Dube, aged 25, lives in Bulawayo. After studying literature, linguistics, Spanish and theatre arts at the University of Zimbabwe for two years, he became a dancer, poet and actor with Sofika Performing Arts. He is presently employed as a literature tutor and seller of visual arts to tourists in Botswana.

John Eppel was born in South Africa in 1947 and grew up in Zimbabwe. He is Head of English at Christian Brothers College in Bulawayo. His first novel, *D.G.G. Berry's The Great North Road*, won the M-Net Prize in South Africa. His second novel, *Hatchings*, was short-listed for the M-Net Prize and was chosen for the series in the *Times Literary Supplement* on the most significant books to have come out of Africa. His first book of poems, *Spoils of War*, won the Ingrid Jonker Prize. His other novels, *The Giraffe Man*, *The Curse of the Ripe Tomato* and *The Holy Innocents*, and his poetry anthologies, *Sonata for Matabeleland* and *Selected Poems: 1965-1995*, have received critical acclaim. He has also written two study guides for Literature in English.

Rain in Winter is to be published in *Carapace*(South Africa).

Shari Eppel is from Bulawayo and has published her poems in several anthologies and magazines. She is a psychologist and a human rights activist with an international reputation. She was the first recipient of the prestigious Barbara Chester award for her work in the field of human rights.

Derek Huggins emigrated to Southern Rhodesia in 1959 at the age of eighteen to join the B.S.A. Police. He rode horse patrols in Matabeleland and later became a detective with the Criminal Investigation Department. In 1974 he opened Gallery Delta for the promotion of contemporary painting. Concurrently, he was the Chief Executive of the National Arts Foundation from 1975 to 1988. *Mtagati Mkulu* was written around thirty years ago.

Anne Simone Hutton, originally from Germany, came to Zimbabwe in 1990. Between 1994 and 2002 she had a studio at the National Gallery in Bulawayo from where she painted for her annual exhibitions. The vitality of Africa and her special love for Bulawayo gave her inspiration to paint and write. She now lives in New Zealand with her husband and son.

Pete Hutton emigrated from England to Zimbabwe in 1990 with his family. He taught English in a state school for some years before starting a tourism business. His writing usually takes the form of prose sketches, but he also writes some poetry. In 2002 he moved to New Zealand, the land of his ancestors.

A.D.C. Hyland, a Londoner, came to Zimbabwe in 1998 as Professor of Architecture at the National University of Science and Technology. He has practised as an architect and taught architecture in England, Ghana and Cyprus. Poetry has been a major interest since his youth and he has published several poems in magazines.

Judy Maposa was born in Bulawayo in 1972, the first of seven children, and was educated at John Tallach in Ntabazinduna and at Mzilikazi High School. She has worked as a proof reader and quality controller at *The Chronicle* and *Sunday News* since 1994. She has had several poems published in these papers. For her, poetry is the language of the emotions - a natural medium for their expression.

Masimba Manyonga was born and raised near Chivhu, but now lives in Northend in Bulawayo. He has written many manuscripts, but *A Seed of Hope* is his first publication. He believes that “if he can’t write, he might as well stop breathing.”

Deon Marcus was born in Bulawayo in 1978 and educated at Milton Junior School and Christian Brothers College. He also studied piano and viola at the Zimbabwe Academy of Music and is currently a member of the Bulawayo Philharmonic Orchestra. He holds an honours degree in accounting science from the University of South Africa.

Christopher Mlalazi was born in 1970 in the Plumtree district, but bred in Bulawayo. He works as a clerk at a local high school. He has had poems and a short story published in the *Sunday News* and his play, *Soil of the Son*, performed by Umkhathi Theatre Works, has been staged successfully at a number of venues in Bulawayo.

Jane Morris, the editor, was born in South Wales in 1953. After being brought up in Wales, she was for many years an expatriate in England, before moving to Bulawayo in 1994. She has a BA and MA in American Literature, as well as social work and training qualifications. She works as a clinical social worker, training manager and book publisher.

Farai Mpofo was born in 1980 in Bulawayo, a first born child in a family of five. He grew up in the townships of Bulawayo, where he still lives. He attended school at Cyrene Mission and later went to the University of Zimbabwe, from where he graduated with an honours degree in theatre arts. He is currently working as an advanced level Literature in English teacher

Mzana Mthimkhulu was born in 1954 at Mpilo Hospital, just across the street from Barbour Fields Stadium. He has lived in Bulawayo most of his life and is currently a human resources practitioner. His short stories and social commentaries have appeared in several newspapers and magazines in Zimbabwe and South Africa. He has been a columnist of the *Sunday News*. The story *True Love* first appeared in the *Sunday News*. He is married and has three children.

Jackson Ndlovu was born in Nkayi District in 1958 and did his secondary education in Bulawayo. He is married with five children. He is involved with several community development groups, including the Edward Ndlovu Memorial Trust, the Historical Association of Zimbabwe and the Mafela Trust. He is a librarian at the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe and a Library and Information Science student at the National University of Science and Technology.

Pathisa Nyathi was born in Sankonjana, Kezi, in 1951. He was a teacher, lecturer and head teacher before moving to his present post of Education Officer. He is a published poet, playwright, historian and biographer; his most recent publications being *In Search of Freedom: Masotsha Ndlovu, Material Culture of the AmaNdebele, Izibongo Lezangelo ZamaNdebele kaMzilikazi, Alvord Mabena: the Man and his Roots* and *Traditional Ceremonies of the AmaNdebele*. He is involved in many development activities, including being Chairman of the Zimbabwe Writers Union (Bulawayo Branch), Vice Chairman of the Zimbabwe Academic and Non-Fiction Authors Association and a Board Member of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair.

Terence Ranger came to Zimbabwe in 1957 to teach at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Thereafter he was Professor at the Universities of Dar es Salaam, UCLA, Manchester and Oxford. On retirement from Oxford in 1997 he spent three and a half years as Visiting Professor at the University of Zimbabwe. He has written seven books about the history of Zimbabwe, the latest two being on southern and northern Matabeleland. He is currently writing a social history of Bulawayo.

Bicycles and the Social History of Bulawayo was published in *Thatha Bhasikili*, accompanying an exhibition of the same name at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo.

John S. Read moved from the University of Zimbabwe to become Professor of Applied Biology at the National University of Science and Technology in 2000. He has taught and travelled widely in Africa, Europe and Japan. His poetry collection, *Msasas in the Longrass*, was published in 2000.

Bryony Rheam was born in Kadoma in 1974. She went to school in Bulawayo, before moving to the UK where she obtained a BA and MA in English. She lectured in Singapore for one year before returning to teach English at Peterhouse in Marondera. Despite not living in Bulawayo for over ten years, she still feels a strong allegiance to it and to Matabeleland in general.

Godfrey M. Sibanda was born in Bulawayo in 1969. Most of his formative years were spent in Bulawayo and he completed his education at the University of Zimbabwe and the University Complutense de Madrid. He taught mathematics in several schools before becoming a Spanish/English translator/interpreter and tourist guide in Victoria Falls.

Shirley Tarr was born in Bulawayo in 1957. She lives in Ntabazinduna and runs a small business with her husband in the city. She is blissfully married with no children, three dogs and a cat.

Short Writings from Bulawayo is a book of stories, poems and non-fiction pieces that are evocative of Zimbabwe's second city and its rural surroundings. Some of the twenty three contributors are well known, including John Eppel, Pathisa Nyathi and Terence Ranger, but the majority are published here for the first time. Bulawayo's special character comes from a history of going its own way and developing its own style, as exemplified in the writings presented here.

The pieces were chosen for their good writing, but also to reflect and celebrate the diversity of life in Zimbabwe. The inspiration for the book was to give voice to new writers who might otherwise be unheard and, through their writing, to bring together the different communities that make up Bulawayo - to show that there is more to unite us than to divide us.

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